THREE KINGS

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Three kings : the story of Saul, David and Solomon

THREE KINGS

THE STORY OF SAUL, DAVID AND SOLOMON

BY

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"MISHNAH", "THE BOOK OF LEGENDS",

"HOLIDAY TALES", ETC.

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SAUL

1. *The First Victory*

NCE there lived a very great prophet in Israel, whose name was Samuel. He was very much beloved and respected by his people, but his sons who were to succeed him were displeasing to Israel. Therefore the Israelites came to Samuel one day, and demanded that he appoint a king over them. The prophet, at first, refused to do so, but upon the advice of God, he granted the request of the people.

Now in those days there lived a hero of the tribe of Benjamin whose name was Kish, and he had a son named Saul. Once it happened that the asses belonging to Kish were lost, and Saul accompanied by a servant went to look for them. They failed to find the asses and Saul said to his servant: "Let us return, for if we linger here my father will worry about us." God thereupon said: "Saul is modest and puts his servant on a level with himself by saying, 'My father will worry about us.'

I shall therefore raise him to the high position of king over My people Israel."

Saul and his servant went to the town where the prophet then lived. Entering the town they met a venerable looking man, whom Saul addressed: "Can you please tell me where the house of the seer is?"

"I am the seer," replied the venerable man, for it was Samuel.

Thereupon a heavenly voice called out: "Verily thou art proud of thyself for thou callest thyself 'seer.' A day will come when thou wilt be proven of thy inability to foresee all things."

Samuel then informed Saul that he had been chosen by God to be the first king over Israel. But Saul was a modest man, and he said to the prophet: "I am a member of the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest tribe in Israel, and my father's family is the smallest in the tribe of Benjamin. Why then, O holy man, do you speak to me thus?"

The prophet made no reply, but invited Saul to be his guest for that night, and made him sit at the head of the people who had been previously invited. The following day, at gray dawn, the prophet anointed Saul as king over Israel.

Samuel gathered all the people at Mizpah, and there Saul was chosen by lot to be king over Israel. When he was brought before Samuel to be anointed, Saul said: "Who am I that I should be considered worthy of being king over Israel?

Pray consult the Urim and Thummim to ascertain whether the lot was correct." The Urim and Thummim were consulted and Saul was proclaimed the chosen ruler of the people.

Saul was beloved by the people, because he was virtuous. He was as free from sin as a one-year-old child. His fame and popularity increased when in the first war during his reign he defeated Nahash, king of the Ammonites.

This king came up and made war against Jabesh-Gilead, on the east of the Jordan. The people of Jabesh were willing to surrender and said to King Nahash: "Make peace with us, and we will serve you."

"On this condition only will I make peace with you," replied the cruel king, that all your right eyes be gouged out."

The people of Jabesh unwilling to submit to this harsh term, said again to Nahash: "Give us seven days' time, that we may send messengers to all the borders of Israel; and then, if there will be none to come to our aid, we will accept your condition."

Nahash, thinking that they would not be able to obtain any help from the tribes on the west of the Jordan, consented to give the people of Jabesh a respite of seven days. The messengers of Jabesh-Gilead then reached Gibeath-shaul, that was in the tribe of Benjamin. They informed the inhabitants of the war waged against them by the Ammonites,

and the disgraceful condition their king desired to impose upon them, in return for peace. The kind people of Gibeath-shaul were helpless, for there was no leader among them to gather an army and meet the Ammonites in war.

Just then Saul, who had been anointed king by the prophet Samuel, came with his oxen from the field, for he was still a shepherd. When Saul heard the people cry and weep, he inquired of them what the cause of it might be. When he was informed of the cause, he immediately took a pair of oxen and cut them into pieces. These pieces he sent throughout the land of Israel, with this message: "Whoever refuses to come to fight against the Ammonites, his oxen will be cut to pieces."

The people thereupon rallied to Saul, and the army increased to three hundred and thirty thousand warriors. Saul then said to the messengers of Jabesh-Gilead: "Go to your people and inform them that on the morrow, before midday, you shall be saved from the cruel enemy."

With great rejoicing the people of Jabesh received the message from Saul, and at once sent word to Nahash: "To-morrow we shall come out to you, and you will do with us as you see fit."

On the following day, Saul divided his army into three companies, and before midday they defeated the Ammonites in battle and scattered them to the winds.

2. *Jonathan's Heroism*

In the next war, this time against the Philistines, King Saul's heroic son Jonathan, accompanied only by his armor-bearer, routed the enemy in the quiet of the night. And this is how it came about:

The Philistines had subjected the Israelites to their rule, and had stationed garrisons in every important town in the land of Israel. Jonathan, who refused to be subjected to the Philistines, had slain the Philistine garrison stationed in Geba.

At once the Philistines had gathered a very huge army and had encamped in Michmash to wage war against the Israelites. Many Israelitish warriors had gathered at the call of King Saul, ready to fight the Philistine army. Because of the Philistines, the Israelites were not possessed of any weapons of war. In the entire Israelitish army, there was not a single sword or spear to be found, save the one Saul and his son Jonathan had. The warriors of Israel, realizing how useless it was to meet such a vast army in war without weapons, had fled from the battle-field and had hidden themselves in caves, in thickets and in pits. Now there were left with King Saul only six hundred heroic warriors, soldiers who would not desert their king.

One day, Jonathan said to his armor-bearer: "Come, let us go over to the garrison of the Philistines, that is on the other side. Perhaps the Lord will work a miracle and save our people through

us. Let this be a sign to us: We will show ourselves to the Philistines, and if they will say to us: 'Stay until we come to you,' then we will remain still in our place and we will not come up to them. But if they will say to us: 'Come up to us,' then we will go up, for the Lord has delivered them into our hands."

In the still of night, without the knowledge of King Saul or anyone else in the army, Jonathan and his armor-bearer approached the garrison of the enemy. The Philistines, upon beholding Jonathan and his armor-bearer, jeeringly exclaimed: "Behold, the Hebrews come out of the holes where they had hidden themselves." Then turning to Jonathan they said: "Come up to us, and we will show you a thing or two."

"Come, let us go up to them," said the courageous prince to his brave armor-bearer, "for the Lord will deliver them into our hands."

Now, between the passages, by which Jonathan desired to go over to the Philistines, there was a sharp rock on one side and a sharp rock on the other side. In the dark of night, Jonathan crawled up the dangerous precipice upon his hands and knees, closely followed by his faithful armor-bearer. Any misstep would have spelled sudden and immediate death for the two heroes, but they successfully reached the top of the rock, and combatted with the enemy. In the first onslaught the two heroes killed twenty men.

From the dead of night, there arose great confusion among the Philistines, for they knew not what had happened. They fled in all directions, greatly terrified and killing one another.

The sentinel stationed in Gibeah of Benjamin breathlessly ran to Saul and exclaimed: "My lord, I noticed great confusion in the enemy's camp. They are scattering in all directions into the dark of night."

The king ordered an investigation, and it was discovered that prince Jonathan and his armor-bearer were missing. Saul and the men with him immediately hastened to the scene of battle. The king was soon joined by all those who had hidden themselves, and the now increased army pursued the panic-stricken Philistines and thoroughly defeated them. Saul proclaimed a fast on that day, and proclaimed: "Cursed be the man who will taste any food until the morning." Jonathan who did not hear this proclamation, tasted some honey while walking through a forest.

At night, Saul consulted the Urim and Thummim to determine whether he should follow the Philistines, but he received no reply. Saul examined the Urim and Thummim and noticed that all the stones in the breastplate of the high priest were bright, but the one bearing the name Benjamin had lost its brilliancy. By casting lots it was found that Jonathan of the tribe of Benjamin had sinned and therefore the brightness of the stone was

dimmed. Jonathan confessed his sin, and Saul was ready to slay his son, but Jonathan was saved by the people who proved to Saul that Jonathan had committed the crime by mistake. The people offered a burnt-offering to atone for the sin committed by Jonathan, and also paid his weight in gold to the sanctuary.

In Saul's campaign against the Amalekites, he disobeyed the command of God by saving the life of Agag, king of the Amalekites, and by allowing the people to take some of the cattle of the Amalekites as booty. Samuel then announced to Saul in the name of God that the throne would be bestowed upon another.

3. *The Anointment of David*

God opened the gates of song, and took the song of birds, the whisper of the forests, the sweet sounds of the clear breezes heard among the leaves, and the singing of the babbling brooks and springs, and out of all these he made a soul which He blew into the nostrils of David. David, before he was born, sang thus: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name." When David was born and he saw the sun, the moon and the stars, he sang: "Bless the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure."

When David grew up he became a shepherd. He was gentle and kind to the flocks entrusted to

him by his father Jesse. The young lambs he led to pastures of tender grass; the sheep he led to pastures of less juicy herbs, and to the sturdy rams he gave the tough weeds for food. Then God said: "David is kind and knows how to tend sheep, therefore shall he be the shepherd of my flock Israel."

In the solitude of the hillsides where David tended his father's sheep, he had an opportunity to display his extraordinary strength and courage. One day David encountered a reem fast asleep. He took it for a mountain and began to ascend it. Suddenly the reem awoke, and David found himself high up in the air on its horns. David prayed to God that He save him, and vowed to build a temple to God one hundred ells in height, as high as the horns of the reem, if he should be rescued. God hearkened to David's prayer and sent a lion to the scene. The reem was frightened at the sight of the king of beasts, and prostrated himself. David descended from the reem, but was met by the lion. God then sent a deer upon the scene, and the lion pursued the deer. Thus was David saved from the lion as well as from the reem.

One day God said to Samuel: "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul? Fill thy horn with oil and go to Jesse of Bethlehem, and anoint one of his sons as ruler over My people in the place of Saul."

Upon Samuel's arrival at the house of Jesse, he saw Jesse's first-born son Eliab. Samuel was over-

whelmed by the wonderful appearance of Eliab and thought that he was the chosen of God. God then said to Samuel: "When thou first metest Saul, thou saidst, 'I am the seer,' and thou wast too sure of thyself; now thou art proven to be unable to foresee all things." Eliab was quick-tempered, and it was for that reason that he was not the chosen of God. When the other sons of Jesse passed in turn before the prophet, he tried to pour the holy oil on the head of each one to anoint one of them as a ruler over Israel, but the oil was swallowed by the horn and it totally disappeared. Finally David was brought to Samuel. Samuel did not have to pour the holy oil upon David's head, for the oil flowed of its own accord, and the drops of oil on David's garment changed into diamonds and pearls.

4. *David in the Palace of Saul*

In those days there lived a very rich man in Israel, and he had a beautiful wife. The rich man died at an early age and the mayor of the city wished to marry the widow, but she refused. She feared the mayor and decided to leave the city for a time. She was unable to carry her fortune with her, but she was afraid to entrust it to any one. She then thought of a plan. She took honey jars, filled them partly with gold, then covered the gold with honey, deposited the jars with a neighbor, and left the city.

One day the neighbor was celebrating the marriage of his son, and he ran short of honey. He thought of the honey left in his care by the woman, and he thought: "I will borrow some of the honey, and as soon as the feast is over, I will fill the jars again." When he tried to empty one of the jars, he discovered to his great surprise that it was partly filled with gold. He tried the other jars and they too were partly filled with gold. He removed the gold from all the jars, filled them up with honey and left them in the same place.

In the course of time, the mayor of the town died. When the woman learned of his death, she returned and demanded the jars from her neighbor. She received the jars, but discovered that the gold concealed in them was gone. She had no evidence to prove her case against the neighbor, and when she brought suit, the court dismissed her case. She appealed to the king, but he too was unable to do anything for her.

When the woman came out crying from the palace of the king, David was playing with his companions nearby. He approached the woman and said to her: "Pray tell me of all your troubles, perhaps I shall be able to do something for you." The widow told David the entire story, and David said to her: "Go to the king and tell him that there is a young boy outside who can prove your claim."

The widow returned to the king and repeated to

him the words of the youthful David. The king called for him and said: "Tell me how you can prove the guilt of the thief, when there is no evidence against him."

David replied: "I believe that the thief in his great haste may have overlooked some of the gold coins, and that these may still be found at the bottom of some of the jars." David then advised that all the jars returned to the woman be broken, and sure enough two gold coins which the thief had overlooked were stuck in one of the jars. The thief trembled greatly when he was discovered, and he was ordered by the king to return to the woman all the gold coins that had been left in his care by the woman. When the people heard of David's wisdom, they said: "Verily, the spirit of the Lord is upon David."

Now it happened that the spirit of God left Saul, and he was advised by his attendants to look for a good harpist to come and play before him so that he might be relieved from his despondence. Doeg, one of the king's officers, reminded Saul of the wonderful wisdom displayed by David at the trial of the widow, and advised the king to send for David, for in addition to his wisdom David was a master player on the harp.

David was taken to the king's palace, and whenever an evil spirit came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play before the king, and the playing always soothed Saul's troubled spirit.

David went forth to meet the giant

5. *David and Goliath*

Now Orpah, the sister of Ruth, had given birth to four giants, of whom Goliath was the strongest and the greatest. He was the chief warrior in the camp of the Philistines. When the army of the Israelites went forth to meet the Philistines on the battle-field, Goliath sent a messenger to Saul, saying: "You have come out to fight against us. Why wage war? Send any one of your warriors to fight with me; if he kills me, the Philistines shall be your slaves; if I kill him, you will be the slaves of the Philistines." Saul on account of his illness dared not encounter the giant, and none in the army of Israel would venture against Goliath.

Now Jesse, the father of David, had sent all his sons to the army of Saul, only David remaining behind to take care of the flocks. One day Jesse sent David to the battle-field to bring some provisions to his brothers. When David reached the battle-field he saw Goliath come forth from the ranks of the Philistines, and make his challenge defying the God of Israel, which Goliath was accustomed to do twice daily. David grew exceedingly angry when he heard the words of the giant, and said to those that were near him: "Who is this Philistine that dares defy our God?" When David was informed of the situation, he offered to accept the challenge.

Thereupon David was brought before Saul, and David repeated his readiness to go out and fight

the giant. The king tried to discourage David, but to no avail. David insisted that with the help of the Lord whom Goliath was defying, he would be able to vanquish the Philistine.

David then put on the armor of King Saul, and to the amazement of all those present, the armor of the powerfully-built king fitted the slender youngster. Saul understood that David was destined for greatness and was jealous of him. David knew Saul's thought, and he therefore decided to discard the armor and to wear the apparel of a simple shepherd.

David went forth to meet the giant, having only a shepherd's pouch and a sling with him. As he was crossing the plain a stone cried out to David: "Pick me up and take me with you." He stooped, picked up the stone and put it into his pouch. When he had advanced a few paces, another stone cried to him: "Pick me up and take me with you." David did so. And a third and a fourth and a fifth stone cried out in like manner, and was likewise taken along by David.

When Goliath perceived David, the giant cried out to him: "Who are you that you have come out to meet me?"

"I have come to fight with you," replied David.

"Go back and play with children of your own age," said the giant. "Come nearer and I will give your flesh to the cattle of the field."

"You are crazy and you are doomed," said David,

"for cattle eat no flesh. I will give your flesh to the fowl of the air." As he said this, David pointed skyward.

Goliath raised his head to see if there were any birds about, and, in so doing, he pushed the visor slightly away from his forehead. David at once aimed the stone he had placed in his sling and struck the giant on the exposed spot. As Goliath fell to the ground face downward, an angel came down from heaven and said: "Let the mouth that spoke defiance against the Lord be choked with earth." David immediately pulled the sword out of the sheath of the giant and with it he cut off the head of him who had defied God and His people.

When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they fled in confusion from the battle-field. The men of Israel and of Judah pursued the fleeing enemy to the gates of Ekron, thoroughly routing the enemy.

David took the head of the giant Goliath to bring it to Jerusalem. On his way there, the women came out from all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet Saul and his victorious army, and particularly the young hero David. And thus did the women sing, to the accompaniment of musical instruments: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

When King Saul heard this, he grew angry, and said: "They have ascribed to David ten thousands,

and to me they have ascribed but thousands, now all he lacks is the kingdom!" From that day King Saul eyed the young hero with jealousy.

6. *Saul Slays the Priests of Nob*

Saul had promised his daughter to the man who should slay Goliath. He now fulfilled his promise and gave his daughter Michal to David in marriage. David proved to be a good general in his engagements against the enemies of the Israelites, and his fame spread all over the land. The more popular David became, the greater grew the jealousy of King Saul against him. Once Saul sent men to kill David in his bed. David was informed by his wife Michal of the king's intentions, and he was compelled to flee for his life in the middle of the night.

David then fled to Ahimelech, the priest, who lived in Nob, a city of priests. Ahimelech was not a little surprised to see the king's beloved son-in-law enter unannounced and unaccompanied, and he inquired: "Why are you alone, not accompanied by any one?"

"The king sent me on an important mission," replied David, "and he said to me: 'Let no man know any thing of the mission about which I sent you.' So I left my men at a certain place yonder. Now pray give me five loaves of bread, or whatever food you can spare."

When Ahimelech handed David whatever bread he had in his possession, David said: "The mission on which the king sent me was very pressing, and therefore I failed to take with me either my sword or my weapons. Perchance you have a sword or a spear in your possession?"

"I have neither sword nor spear of my own," replied the priest, "but the sword of the giant Goliath, whom you have slain in the vale of Elah, is lying there behind the ephod, wrapped up in a cloth. You can have it if you will."

"There is none better than that," replied David. "Pray give it to me."

So Ahimelech gave David the sword of Goliath, and David fled for fear of Saul.

Now, when all this happened between David and Ahimelech, there chanced to be in the sanctuary a certain man of the servants of King Saul, who saw everything that had taken place. This man was Doeg, the Edomite, the chief of the herdmen that belonged to Saul. But he said not a word to either Ahimelech or David.

One day, as he was surrounded by all the royal servants, King Saul addressed them thus: "Hear now, you Benjamites; will David the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all captains of thousands and of hundreds, that you have all conspired against me? Why was not there any one to disclose to me that

my own son, together with David, my enemy, plotted against me?"

Then Doeg, the Edomite, stepped forward and bowing before the king, said: "O sire, I saw David, the son of Jesse, coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech gave David provisions, and he even gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

"Call Ahimelech, and all the priests of Nob to present themselves before me at once!" ordered the infuriated king.

"Hear me, you son of Ahitub," said the king to the aged priest; "why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you gave him bread and a sword, that he should rise against me, and lie in wait for me?"

"O sire," said the aged priest in a trembling voice, "who among all the king's servants is as trustworthy as David, who is the king's son-in-law? Let not the king impute any evil intentions to his servant, for the king's servant knows nothing of all this, and innocently helped out the king's son-in-law."

"You shall die, Ahimelech, you and your father's house," said the king, "for having conspired against me." Then, turning to his bodyguard, the king ordered: "Attack these priests and slay them all, because they have conspired with David against me."

But the servants of the king would not put forth their hands to attack the priests of the Lord. Then the king turned to Doeg: "Obey you the command of your king and kill all these priests."

So Doeg, the Edomite, in the presence of the king, killed eighty-five innocent priests. Saul's wrath knew no bounds. At his command were slain all the inhabitants of Nob, men, women, children and infants; even oxen, asses and sheep were put to the sword. Only one of the sons of Ahimelech, Abiathar, escaped and he fled to David. Abiathar told David of Saul's brutal act, and David said: "When I saw the Edomite there on that day, I knew he would surely tell Saul; alas, I have brought about the death of all these innocent people!"

7. *David Feigns Insanity*

King Saul was not content, and he constantly pursued David. Once, as he was fleeing, David saw a man afflicted with madness, who was followed and jeered at by many children. David said: "The world would be beautiful and good, were it not for insanity. What use does the world derive from a lunatic, who runs hither and thither, tears his clothes, and is pursued by a mob of hooting children?"

"Verily," said God to David, "a time will come when thou wilt pray to Me to afflict thee wtih madness."

It happened that David in his flight from King Saul had to leave the land of Israel. He came to Achish, the king of the Philistines, who lived in Gath. The three giant brothers of Goliath formed the body-guard of the king of the Philistines. They recognized David and they demanded from the king that the murderer of their brother be killed. In his distress, David prayed to God to let him appear as a madman in the eyes of King Achish and his court.

David went through the streets, tore his clothes, ran hither and thither, and wrote upon the gates of the courts that King Achish was indebted to him for the sum of one hundred myriads of golden shekels, and that the queen owed him fifty myriads of golden shekels. David was brought to the king's court followed by a mob of hooting children. Now, the wife and the daughter of the king were both afflicted with insanity. When the king looked out of the window and saw David acting like a lunatic, he exclaimed: "Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence?" Thus was David's life saved.

8. *David Cuts the Skirt of Saul*

At another time David had said that there was no need for the spider in this world, that it was an absolutely useless creature. "All it does," said David, "is spin a web that is of no value." Now

in the course of his flight from Saul, David took refuge in a cave. Saul and his men were not far from the cave and were about to enter it and seek David there. But God sent a spider to weave its web across the opening. When Saul noticed the web stretching across the mouth of the cave, he said to his men: "It is futile to enter the cave to search for David. No one has entered this cave for some time as the spider's web across the opening is unbroken." Saul and his men then left, and thus David's life was saved by a spider.

While Saul was at the mouth of the well where David and his men were hiding, the men of David said: "Your enemy is now in your hand; you may do to him as it seems good to you."

"The Lord forbid that I should do any harm to my master," said David; "he is the Lord's anointed, and I dare not put forth my hand against him."

David would not permit his men to do any harm to the king, but he himself quietly went to the mouth of the cave, and cut off Saul's skirt. Saul then left the mouth of the cave, and after he had gone some distance, David, too, came out of the cave, and he cried after Saul: "My lord the king!" When the king turned around to see who had called him, David said: "O king, why do you pay attention to the words of the slanderers, who say

that I seek to take your life? Now, see, I had an opportunity to kill you in the cave, and, indeed, my men urged me to do so, but I refused to put forth my hand against the anointed of the Lord. Pray see, here is the skirt that I have cut off while you were at the mouth of the cave. Now you can readily see that I had a chance to take your life, but I spared you. You see now that I have no evil intentions against you, and yet you seek to take my life. The Lord judge between us, but my hand shall not be upon you. As the proverb of the ancients says: 'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.' Forsooth, after whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom does he pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea."

When David had finished speaking, Saul was very much moved by David's impressive words, and he said: "Is this your voice, my son David?" Saul wept bitterly and continued: "David, my son, you are more righteous than I am; for you rewarded me good, whereas I rewarded you evil. Now, I know well that you shall surely be king over Israel. Swear to me, by the Lord then, that you will not cut off my seed after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father's house."

David complied with Saul's request. Saul went home, and David and his men stayed in a stronghold.

9. *David Takes Saul's Cruse and Spear*

On another occasion, David expressed his opinion that the wasp was a useless creature. Now David always wished to convince King Saul, his father-in-law, that he desired his friendship. Once while Saul and his men were lying fast asleep in their camp, David visited them. To prove to his father-in-law that he had visited his camp and that he might have harmed Saul had he wished to do so, David resolved to carry off the cruse that was standing between the feet of Saul's general Abner, who was a giant of extraordinary size. Abner was lying with his knees drawn up, but as David took the cruse and was about to leave, Abner stretched out his legs, and pinned David down as with two solid pillars. But a wasp came to David's rescue. It stung Abner so that he moved his feet in his sleep and released David.

David took the cruse and Saul's spear and went to the other side. He stood on the top of a hill far off, and he cried out to Abner, Saul's commander-in-chief: "Would you answer, O Abner?"

"Who is calling to the king?" inquired Abner, looking around.

"Are not you a valiant man?" asked David. "Who is like to you in Israel? why then have you failed to keep your lord the king? Lo, there came one of the people into your camp to take the life of your king. You certainly deserve to die, because

you have not kept your master, the Lord's anointed. Now, see where is the king's spear, and where is his cruse of water?"

Saul recognized David's voice, and he said: "Is this your voice, my son David?"

"It is my voice, my lord, O king," replied David. "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? for what have I done? or what evil is in my hand?"

"Indeed, I have sinned against you," answered the repentant king. "Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because you spared my life this day; behold I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly."

"Here is the king's spear!" said David; "let one of the young men come over and fetch it."

So Saul returned to his royal palace, but David continued to wander with his men looking for places of safety where he might hide from the wrath of Saul.

10. *The Death of Saul*

Samuel died at the age of fifty-two, and all Israel from Dan to Beer Sheba mourned for him. There was only one person in all the land who did not take part in the mourning; Nabal, instead of being grieved at the great loss, made a feast at his home. "What!" God exclaimed, "all Israel weeps and laments over the death of My beloved servant, Samuel, and this worthless man engages in feast-

ing!" Three days after the week of mourning for Samuel, Nabal died.

Upon the death of Samuel, Saul became discouraged, for he was now left isolated and alone. The Philistines soon gathered their armies again to fight with the Israelites. Saul tried to inquire of God, as to the outcome of the war, but neither in his dreams, nor by the Urim and Thummim and the prophets, did he receive a reply. He then decided to get into communication with the dead prophet Samuel.

Saul disguised himself and together with his two generals Abner and Amasa he went to Abner's mother, who was the witch of En-dor. He requested her to bring up the spirit of Samuel. When she began to summon the dead prophet back to earth, Samuel thought that the day of judgment had arrived. He went to Moses and pleaded: "Pray accompany me and testify for me that I have always followed the law of God." Samuel, accompanied by Moses, answered the summons of the witch of En-dor and appeared before Saul.

The witch was terrified when she beheld the spirit of the dead prophet. "All the spirits of the dead that I have raised until now," she said, "have appeared with their heads downward and with their feet in the air. This figure stands upright before me." She then understood that Saul was in her house, and she became greatly alarmed, for Saul had slain all the witches that had been found

in the land of Israel. But when Saul assured her by taking an oath that no harm would befall her, she took courage, and informed him that she had seen the spirit of Samuel.

Then the spirit spoke to Saul: "Why didst thou enkindle the wrath of God by calling up the spirits of the dead? God has resolved to wrest the kingdom out of thy hand, and give it to David."

"While thou wast dwelling among the living," said the terrified king, "thou didst not mention to me the name of David."

"When we dwelt together," answered Samuel, "I was in a world of lies, and I feared thy wrath and thy revengeful nature. Now I abide in a world of truth, and thou hearest only words of truth from me. To-morrow thou and thy sons shall dwell together with me."

On the following day, King Saul summoned his three sons and said to them: "Come let us fight for our people." God called together the heavenly hosts and said to them: "Behold the being My hand hath created! Saul goeth to war knowing that he will lose his life, yet he taketh his sons with him, and cheerfully accepteth the punishment ordained."

Immediately, Moses appeared before God and pleaded: "Master of all creatures, pray save the humble Saul from death. Does it really please Thee that the first king of Thy people, the chosen of God, shall be killed?"

"Do not entreat Me," answered God, "but plead with the priests of Nob who were slain by him and who now stand before me accusing him of bloodshed."

So the first king of Israel met his death as a hero and a saint.

DAVID

DAVID

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DAVID

1. *His Wars*

WHEN David ascended the throne of Israel, he desired first of all to take possession of Jerusalem. Now the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem were the descendants of the sons of Heth who had sold the Cave of Machpelah to Abraham. When the sale took place Heth said to Abraham: "On this condition do I sell the cave to you, that your children should never take Jerusalem, the capital city, by force." Monuments of brass were erected to bear evidence of this agreement. When therefore David approached Jerusalem, the Jebusite pointed out to him the promise of Abraham engraved upon the brass monuments, and they said to him: "If you desire to take the city, you will have to destroy the monuments first."

The city of Jerusalem was well fortified by a high wall, and the Jebusites thought it would be impossible for David to gain entrance to the city and destroy the monuments without using force. Now, Joab, the general of David's army, was a

very famous warrior and David's right-hand man. He now devised a plan to get into the city. He brought a tall cypress tree and set it up near the wall which surrounded the city. He bent the tree downward and, standing upon the head of David, he grasped the very tip of the tree. When the tree rebounded, Joab was raised high above the wall, and he jumped from the tree and alighted upon the wall. He then jumped into the city and destroyed the monuments. David wished to duplicate the feat of Joab, but in his case a miracle happened: the wall shrank in height so that he stood over it and walked into the city without difficulty. David and Joab destroyed the monuments without using force, and the city was taken by David's warriors.

When the Philistines heard that David had ascended the throne, they gathered their armies to fight against the Israelites. David went out to meet the Philistines in battle in the Valley of the Giants. God appeared to David and commanded him thus: "Thou shalt not attack the host of the Philistines until thou wilt hear the mulberry trees rustle."

The enemy advanced until there was but a short distance between them and the Israelites. The Israelitish warriors were full of hope and courage and were ready to throw themselves against the Philistines, but David restrained them, saying: "God has commanded me not to attack the enemy

before the tops of the mulberry trees begin to rustle. If we disobey His command, we shall surely die. If we delay the attack, it is probable that we shall be killed by the Philistines, but we shall at any rate die like pious men that keep God's command. Let us have confidence in God and in His words."

Scarcely had he finished speaking when the tops of the mulberry trees began to rustle. David and his men, who had waited impatiently for this signal to attack the enemy, at once hurled themselves against the Philistines and defeated them in the fierce battle that followed.

When King Saul died, the angels in heaven surrounded the throne of God and said: "Why, O Lord, hast Thou taken away the royal dignity from Saul and given it to David?"

Now God said to the heavenly host: "See the difference between Saul and David. Saul had consulted the Urim and Thummin, but when he saw the Philistines drawing nigh, he abandoned the Urim and Thummin and fled."

2. *The Heroism of Joab*

Shortly afterward Joab chose twelve thousand warriors, whom he considered to be the flower of the army of Israel, and set out to capture the capital city of the Amalekites. The city was strongly fortified, and Joab and his men besieged it for six months, but were unable to capture it.

"It would be better for us to return to our homes, to our wives and our children," the soldiers said to their general Joab. "There is no possibility of our getting into this city."

"Such a step would not only make us the object of contempt and derision in the eyes of our brothers," said Joab, "but it would also prove fatal to our people. When our enemies hear of our retreat, they will unite as one to wage war against us. Now hurl me into the city by means of a sling, and then wait forty days. If at the end of the forty days you will see blood flowing from the gates of the fortress, it will be a sign to you that I am still alive."

The soldiers were unwilling to do the bidding of their general, but Joab insisted and they hurled him with a powerful sling over the high walls that surround the city.

When Joab was cast from the sling, he fell into the garden of a widow, whose daughter found him unconscious. He soon regained his consciousness, and he thus explained his presence to the widow and her daughter: "I am an Amalekite and I was captured by the Israelites. They stripped me of my country clothes and made me put on clothes made according to their fashion. They tried to make a slave of me, but when I refused to take orders from them, they decided to inflict death upon me by throwing me over the walls of our city by means of a sling. Now I will pay you well if you will let me have garments worn by our people the

They hurled Joab with a powerful sling over the high walls

Amalekites, for I dare not walk out in the streets of the city with Israelitish clothes on me, lest I be taken for a spy."

As soon as Joab was provided with the garb of an Amalekite he went to a blacksmith to have a sword made, for his own had been broken by his fall. The smith forged a new sword for Joab, but when Joab grasped it firmly, it broke in his hand. The smith forged a second sword, and it, too, broke in the firm grasp of the general. The smith made a third attempt and this time succeeded in making a sword suitable for Joab.

As Joab tested the sword in his hand, he asked the blacksmith, "Whom would you like to slay with this sword?"

"I would like to kill Joab, the general of the Israelitish king," the smith replied.

"I am the one whom you would like to kill," said Joab, and when the smith rose in astonishment, Joab killed him instantly. As he walked through the streets, he killed five hundred Amalekites, and not one escaped to betray him. This onslaught Joab repeated at intervals of several days, and the Amalekites said to one another: "Asmodeus, the king of demons, is raging among the inhabitants of our city, and slaying them in large numbers."

The number of Amalekites slain by Joab reached into the thousands, but the Israelites were not aware of Joab's success. But when the Israel-

itish warriors were already beginning to mourn the loss of their heroic general, they noticed a stream of blood flowing from the fortress of the besieged city. The soldiers joyfully cried out: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." Suddenly they heard a voice answer from the top of a high tower: "The Lord will not forsake His people." The soldiers raised their eyes in astonishment and saw that this response had come from their beloved general Joab.

Joab then descended from the tower, and at his command the valiant warriors captured the city of the Amalekites, and destroyed the heathen temples. The king of the Amalekites, who was wearing a crown of pure gold on his head, was taken captive and was brought before King David.

3. *The Holy Ark Removed to Jerusalem*

Among the chief councillors at the court of King David there was a learned man whose name was Ahithophel. He was a man of remarkable learning and wisdom. The king always followed the advice of Ahithophel, for the oracles rendered by the very Urim and Thummim were always in accord with the advice of this councillor.

One day David chose ninety thousand men, learned in the law of God, and appointed them as leaders among the people. Ahithophel became very angry, for the king had omitted him from the list. On that day a remarkable thing happened.

David had decided to remove the Holy Ark, which had hitherto been at Geba, to Jerusalem. At the king's command, the ark was to be placed on a wagon to be removed. But when the priests attempted to take hold of it, they were raised into the air and thrown violently to the ground. This happened several times. David in his despair turned to Ahithopel and asked: "Tell me wherewith we may be able to appease God?"

"Let the king make no inquiry of me; let him consult the ninety thousand men that he has but now installed in office," retorted Ahithophel.

"He who knows a remedy and withholds it from the sufferer shall not die a natural death, but shall be strangled," said David.

Thereupon Ahithophel said: "Even school children are acquainted with the law that the holy Ark must not be conveyed in a wagon, but that it must be carried on the shoulders of priests."

4. *A Father's Love*

Once, in a discussion with Joab, his general, David said: "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those that fear him." Joab was astonished and thought: "Why does the king compare the love of God to the love of a father for his child, and not with the love of a mother? Mother-love is always stronger and the more self-sacrificing."

Joab made up his mind to find out whether

David's idea of the love of parents for their children was the correct one. One day, he chanced to enter the house of a poor old man who was the father of twelve children. The old man supported his children and his wife with the toil of his own hands.

The general said to the old man: "You have twelve children and you work very hard to support them. Now sell me one of them and I will give you a good price for him. You will have one child less to care for, and with the money I give you you will be able to take better care of the other children."

"Thank you for your offer," replied the good father; "but all my children are dear to me, and I cheerfully work hard to support them. I will not sell any of my children for any price."

When the father had left the house, Joab approached the mother, and said to her: "Good woman, you have twelve children to take care of. I will give you one hundred gold denarii for one of your children." The mother at first refused to accept the offer, but Joab finally persuaded her and she agreed to accept the gold denarii for one of her children. Joab paid her the money, took the child and left the old man's house.

In the evening the father returned home, and cut the bread, as was his custom, into fourteen slices, for himself, his wife and his twelve children. When he distributed the portions, he no-

ticed that one of the children was missing, for he had one portion left over.

"Now what has happened to my child?" asked the father. The mother then told him truthfully that she had sold the child to the general while the father was away. The father was greatly grieved, and would neither eat nor drink.

Early in the morning, he took the one hundred gold denarii from his wife and left the house to overtake the Israelitish army. After a long journey, the old man reached the headquarters of the king's general, and when he was allowed to enter, he said to Joab: "Here are your gold denarii, and pray return the child to me."

"The child was sold to me by your wife, the child's mother," said Joab, "and you cannot get him back."

"If you refuse to return my child to me," said the old man, "I will spill your blood in the presence of the army of our king."

The warrior smiled. He surrendered the child to his father, refused to take the money back and said: "Yes, our king was right when he compared God's love for man to a father's love for his child."

5. *The Great Depth*

David was very desirous of building the Lord's Temple, but God would not allow him to do so, because David was a man of blood. God there-

fore sent His prophet Nathan to advise David not to build the Temple.

When David heard the message that God had sent to him by Nathan, he trembled and said: "Ah, verily, God has found me unworthy to build His Sanctuary."

"Nay, the blood which thou hast shed," replied God, "I regard as the blood of sacrifices. I do not wish to have thee build the Temple, because then it would remain standing forever, and would never be destroyed."

"That would be excellent," said David.

"But I foresee that the children of Israel will sin," said God, "and as a punishment I shall destroy the Temple and thus save Israel from destruction. But thy son that shall succeed thee shall certainly build My Temple."

David was pleased when he heard that one of his sons would ascend the throne and build the Temple. David then said: "Let me start digging the foundation for the Temple which my son shall build."

While he was digging the foundation, David found a shard at a depth of one thousand five hundred cubits. He was about to lift the shard, when it exclaimed: "Thou must not do it."

"Why not?" asked the king.

"Because I rest upon the abyss."

"Since when have you been resting there?"

"When the voice of God was heard uttering the words from Sinai, 'I am the Lord thy God,' the earth quaked and sank into the abyss. God then placed me here to cover the abyss. If I am removed, the waters of the abyss will flood the earth."

David, however, disregarded the words of the shard, and lifted it. Immediately the waters of the abyss began to rise and threatened to flood the earth. Ahithophel, the youthful counsellor of David, was standing near the excavations. He thought to himself as he saw the waters rising higher and higher: "Now David will perish and I shall be king over Israel."

The king in his desperate straits exclaimed: "Whoever knows how to restore the shard to its place, and fails to do so, will die a horrible death!"

Ahithophel thereupon took a piece of clay, inscribed upon it the Name of God, and threw it into the abyss. The waters subsided at once, but they sank so low that David was afraid that the earth would lose its moisture. The waters sank to a depth of fifteen thousand cubits, but David sang the fifteen "Songs of Ascents," and the waters were lifted fifteen thousand cubits to their normal level.

6. *David's Sin*

David was successful in all the wars he waged against his enemies, and in everything he undertook. He was beloved of all the people of Israel,

and his fame spread all over the earth. But with all this he was pious and humble. He devoted his spare time to the study of the Law, and to singing songs of praise to God.

David was a man of little sleep. Every evening before bedtime, he hung his harp at the head of his bed. Now the strings of the harp were made out of the gut of the ram that had been sacrificed by Abraham on Mount Moriah. This wonderful instrument was so placed each evening that its face was turned toward the north. When the cool night air stirred in the room, it agitated the strings of the harp. The musical instrument gave out such sweet notes, that David was aroused from his sleep at midnight. Then he would occupy himself with the study of the Law and with singing Psalms of praise to God.

One day David complained to God, saying: "O Lord of the world, why do people say 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob,' and never 'the God of David?' "

"Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were tried and proven by Me," came the reply of God, "but thou hast not been tried."

"Then, O Lord, examine me, try me," David entreated.

God said: "I will put thee to the proof, and I will even grant thee what I did not grant Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To them I did not say beforehand that I was about to try them, but I tell

thee that I am going to test thee and therefore take care."

Once Satan disguised himself and appeared to David in the shape of a little bird. The king shot an arrow at the bird, but the bird escaped and stood on the top of a wicker screen. David shot again at the bird, but instead he hit the screen which toppled over. Behind the screen David beheld the beautiful Bath-sheba combing her hair. When David returned to his palace, he immediately sent for Bath-sheba and compelled her to become his wife.

David soon realized that he had transgressed against God, and he repented. God afflicted David with leprosy, and all his friends were compelled to leave him for a period of six months. Even the spirit of God departed from him. For many years, David wept and prayed to God that his sin be forgiven, but God inflicted many punishments upon David for his crime. The severest penalty of all was the rebellion of his own son Absalom.

7. *Rebellion of Absalom*

Absalom, son of King David, was a man of gigantic stature, of rare beauty, and of great amiability. But one day Absalom decided to start a rebellion against his own father. He appeared before his royal father and said to him: "I am going to Hebron to fulfill a vow I made while in

exile. Pray give me a letter permitting me to choose two elders from each and every town to accompany me on the way."

David gave Absalom the letter he requested, and the rebellious son selected on the way two hundred of the most prominent chiefs of the courts, and they followed him to Hebron. He then ordered, upon the advice of Ahithopel who had joined him, that the entire assembly should, upon hearing the sound of a trumpet, shout, "Absalom reigns!"

When David was informed of Absalom's rebellion, he urged all his friends to flee from Jerusalem. In the course of his flight, the king thus sang to God: "Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God, Thy judgments are a great deep."

"The king is forced to flee from his rebellious son, and yet he calls it 'righteousness,'" said the wondering attendants.

"Am I not in better circumstances than our father Jacob who had to flee from his brother? And is not my condition better than that of Moses who had to flee from the wrath of Pharaoh?" answered the king. "They were alone and accompanied by no one, but to me God is kind; I see friends and faithful bodyguards around me. Furthermore, the rebel may take pity on me, for he is my own son."

When the fleeing king and his attendants reached the Mount of Olives, the king commanded his men to bring him an idol. His men went to search for

an idol when they were met by Hushai the Archite, one of David's best friends. The king's men explained to Hushai what they had been sent for. Hushai immediately went to David and said to him: "The people will wonder that such a king should worship idols."

"In time to come," replied David, "people will wonder and say: 'Should a king such as David be punished and killed by his own son?' They will then desecrate the Name of God and say: 'It is vain to serve God and worship Him, for even a most pious man like King David receives no mercy from the hand of God.' I therefore wished to serve an idol in the presence of my people, so that the people in time to come will say that I was justly punished by God with death at the hands of my own son."

The rebellion of Absalom came to a fearful end. Ahitophel, the chief adviser of Absalom, ended his days by hanging himself, because his advice as to how the attack should be made on David was not accepted by Absalom. During a battle with David's troops, Absalom's long locks of hair were caught in an oak-tree while he rode through a forest. He was about to cut his hair with the sword in his hand, but suddenly he saw hell open beneath him, and he said to himself: "Better to remain hanging in the tree than to throw myself alive into this fearful inferno."

At this moment God said: "Because Absalom stole the hearts of his father, of the people and of the chief judges, three darts shall rend his heart." And so it was. Joab saw the rebel Absalom hanging by his hair in the oak-tree, and he shot three darts into the heart of Absalom.

8. *Another Rebellion Quashed*

A certain base fellow, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, from the tribe of Benjamin, instigated a rebellion, gained a large following and proclaimed: "We have nothing to do with David; every man to his tent." Thereupon many men of Israel deserted King David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri.

Joab, at the command of King David, pursued Sheba and his men. Sheba took refuge in Abel, a fortified city, and Joab and his men laid siege to the city. Joab's men threw up a mound and from it kept on battering the walls of the city.

Now in that city, there lived a woman, Serah by name, who was the daughter of Asher, Jacob's son. She had been blessed by Jacob with long life for it was she who had informed him that Joseph was alive in Egypt. Serah ascended the wall of Abel and exclaimed: "Pray tell the king's general that a woman would like to speak to him."

When Joab approached the gates of the city, she said to him: "Are you Joab, who has a seat in

the Highest Court of the land? Why then do you violate the law of God who commanded that when you draw nigh to a city to fight against it, you must first make peace overtures to it?"

"Pray tell me who are you?" asked the general.

"I am Serah the daughter of Asher, the son of Jacob," answered the woman.

"It is not my intention to destroy a city of Israel," said Joab; "I wish only to get the rebel Sheba who is seeking safety behind the walls of this town. Deliver him into my hands and I will raise the siege."

"His head shall be thrown down to you from the top of this wall," Serah assured him.

Serah called together the elders of the city and said to them: "The king's general and his men desire to destroy our city and slay us all."

"What does he demand of us, and how can we appease him that he may not destroy us?" asked the frightened inhabitants of Abel.

"He demands that we deliver into his hands one thousand men to be slain," answered the woman. "But I will go to him again and ask him to reduce the number to five hundred."

After a short absence, she returned to the people and told them that Joab would be satisfied with five hundred men, and the people said: "Well, we will cast lots among us and choose the five hundred victims."

"I will go again to the general," said Serah,

"perhaps he will be willing to reduce the number again."

Serah then came with the glad news that Joab was willing to accept only one man, Sheba the son of Bichri. The people of Abel killed Sheba and threw his head down to Joab. Thereupon the general ordered every fighting man to return to his home.

9. *David Kills Goliath's Brother*

God said to David one day: "On account of thee the priestly city of Nob was destroyed by Saul, and on thy account Saul and his three sons were slain in the battle with the Philistines. How much longer shall this sin remain unatoned? Now, what wouldst thou prefer—that thy children should perish, or that thou thyself shouldst be delivered into the hands of thine enemies?"

"Let me fall into the hands of my enemies," answered David.

One day, David was hunting in the wilderness. Then came Satan in the form of a stag, and David shot an arrow at the deer, but could not kill it. He followed it and it ran before him into the land of the Philistines. There David was recognized by Ishbi-benob the giant, a brother of Goliath. The giant said: "David has slain my brother, now he is in my power!"

Ishbi-benob seized David, chained him, cast him down, and laid a wine-press upon him that he

night crush him and squeeze all the blood out of him. But God softened the earth beneath David, so that he remained there uninjured.

At that time Abishai, a general of David and a brother of Joab, was getting ready to welcome the Sabbath, for the misfortune to the king happened on a Friday. Abishai filled a basin with water to wash his hands therein, when he suddenly noticed drops of blood in the water. Then he was startled by a dove that came to him, plucking out her plumes, moaning, and wailing. The dove had seen the plight of the king, and had come to Jerusalem in grief.

Abishai understood that the king was in danger. He went to look for him in the palace, in the house of study, but the king was nowhere to be found. Abishai then sought the wise men, learned in the Law, and said to them: "The king of Israel is in danger, and the only means of reaching him with speed is to mount the royal mule which is as swift as the wind, but the law forbids any one to ride the king's mounts."

"In an emergency all things are lawful," decided the learned men.

Abishai at once mounted the mule of King David, and rode into the desert. The earth contracted under the feet of the mule, and Abishai reached the house of Ishbi-benob in the twinkling of an eye.

Orpah, the mother of the giant, sat outside the

door spinning. When she saw Abishai galloping up, she broke her thread and flung the spindle at him, with the intention of striking him dead. But the spindle fell short. Orpah cried to Abishai: "Give me my spindle, boy." Abishai stopped, picked up the spindle and cast it at Orpah with all his might. The spindle struck her on the brow, and she fell back and died.

Ishbi-benob learned what had happened to his mother, and he said to himself: "These two men will be too much for me!" He raised the wine-press and, to his amazement, he found David alive. He drew David out from under the wine-press, flung him high into the air and set his lance in the ground, that David might fall upon it, and be transfixed. But at that moment Abishai rode up and he called out the Name of God. David remained suspended in the air. Abishai again pronounced the Name of God, and David was gradually let down, landing some distance from the lance.

David and Abishai thereupon ran away, hotly pursued by the giant, but when they had fled some distance, David said to Abishai: "Let us turn and face the giant, perhaps we shall be able to overcome him." The giant hurled his shield at David to kill him, but David jumped backward eighteen cubits and thus he escaped death. Then David and Abishai slew Ishbi-benob, the fourth giant-son of Orpah.

10. *Solomon's Wise Decision*

When Solomon was still a lad, there lived a very rich man, who once sent his son on a long business trip to Africa.

After many years the son returned and found that his father had died in the meantime, and that his treasures had passed into the hands of one of the slaves. This slave had so badly treated the widow and the daughter of the rich man that they had fled from their own home to seek peace in some unknown place.

The son entered his father's house and said to the slave: "I am the son of your dead master, and now I demand that you turn over my father's property to me." The slave laughed and said: "You are an impostor. I am the son of the dead man, and all that you see belongs to me."

The slave thereupon called together his servants and ordered them to drive the young man out of the house.

The son appeared before King David and told him of all that had happened, and the king asked: "Do you have any witnesses to prove your case?"

"I have no witnesses," said the son, "for all the servants of my father's house who remember me fear the wrath of the slave and would not testify in my favor."

"I am sorry I am unable to do anything for you," said the king, "since you have no witnesses

to prove your claim, and the other has many people to testify for him."

The son, sorely disappointed, left the palace to look for some help. Thereupon the youthful Solomon, who had overheard the man's story, said to David: "Father, will you permit me to try this case for you?"

"Yes, my son, you have my permission," said David.

Solomon at once ordered that the slave and the son of the dead man appear before the king again, and when they came up he said to them: "Now each one of you claims to be the real son of the rich man. Go to the grave where the rich man is buried, break it open, take one of the dead man's bones, break it and bring it to me."

As the two men left the palace, Solomon ordered three of the court attendants to follow the two men secretly, watch their movements and report to him. And this is what the attendants reported to the youthful Solomon: "We followed the two men closely, and when they reached the grave, one of them said to the other, 'You shameless slave! does it not suffice you that you have robbed my father of his property, but you must also insult his remains and rob his grave?' The other man heaped insults and curses upon the first, opened the grave, took out a bone from the dead man's body and broke it."

When the two men appeared before Solomon,

ne said to the son: "Where is the broken bone hat I have commanded you to bring to me?"

"Even if I were to lose my entire possessions," aid the son, "I would not dare insult my beloved ather by opening his grave, taking one of his ones, and breaking it."

"As for me," said the crafty slave, "I have beyed your order, and here is one of my father's ones."

"Now we can easily decide who the true son is," aid Solomon. "Let the rightful son take posses- ion of his father's property, and let this crafty lave receive his punishment."

The rightful heir took possession of his father's roperty to the great rejoicing of the household. He called for the crafty slave and said to him: I will pardon you for all the evil you have done, f you will but find my mother and my sister and ring them back to me."

The slave went to look for the two women, and fter some time he found them living in poverty n a distant town. He informed them of the return f the rightful heir, and he brought them back to heir home. The son not only pardoned the slave nd set him free, but he also provided him with noney and food and sent him to live in a far-off own.

11. *The Death of David*

One day David said to God: "O Lord, tell me he number of years that I am destined to live."

"Thy petition cannot be granted," said God, "for I have ordained that no man shall know his end."

"Then tell me, O Lord," pleaded David, "the day of the week when I shall die."

"Thou shalt die on the Sabbath," God informed him.

"O merciful God," pleaded David again, "may I be permitted to die on a Friday."

"Thy wish cannot be granted," responded God; "for one day passed by thee in the study of the Torah and in the singing of Psalms is more delightful to Me than a thousand offerings that may be made by thy son Solomon."

"O God, permit me then to die on a Sunday," said David.

"This too must be denied thee," said God, "for on the Sunday after thy death thy son will ascend the throne, and thou canst not live even one moment while thy son is king."

Now the Angel of Death has no power to take the life of a man when he is engaged in the fulfilment of God's commandments. David, therefore, from the time he had held his conversation with God, was in the habit of occupying himself exclusively with the study of the Torah every Sabbath, to escape the Angel of Death.

When the Sabbath came for David to pass away, the Angel of Death entered the palace and found David engaged in the study of the Torah. He

waited and waited, but David would not cease studying even for a single moment. The Angel of Death had to resort to cunning to gain possession of David's soul. He went into the garden and caused a violent rustling among the trees. The king arose and walked over to the stairway leading from his palace to the garden. He intended to descend the stairway in order to discover the cause of the noise, but as soon as he placed his foot on the topmost step, the entire stairway tumbled down and King David was killed.

SOLOMON

SOLOMON'S WISDOM

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SOLOMON'S WISDOM

1. *Solomon Accepts Wisdom from God*

HEN Solomon ascended the throne of his father David, he was very young. One night, God appeared to him in a dream and said to him: "Choose whatever thou pleasest and it shall be granted thee."

"O Lord," replied the youthful king, "I care not for wealth, nor for glory, nor for conquest. All I wish is that Thou open for me the Gates of Wisdom."

God granted Solomon's request and He opened for him the forty-nine Gates of Wisdom. The first proof of his wisdom, while he was king, came in the decision of a case that had been brought before him. God desired that the wisdom of Solomon be made known the world over, and He sent two spirits in the form of two women who appeared before Solomon for trial. They brought with them a babe, and each one claimed that the babe belonged to her.

Solomon said: "Take a sword and cut the babe into two equal parts, and give one-half to one of the women and the other half to the other."

"Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a boy!" exclaimed the councillors of the young king.

"Kill it," said one woman; "it shall be neither mine nor hers."

The real mother said to the king: "Pray give the child to this woman, but do not kill it."

"Give it to the second woman," ordered Solomon, "for she is the real mother of the child."

When the councillors realized the wisdom of the king, they all proclaimed: "Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is a free man!"

After that, the fame of Solomon's wisdom spread far and wide.

Solomon understood the language of the beasts and the birds, and he was ruler over them. Even the animals came to Solomon to have him decide their disputes.

2. *The Man and the Serpent*

Once a man was walking alone through a field. In his hand he carried a jug of milk. On the way he met a serpent who was weeping and wailing pitifully.

"What ails you?" asked the man of the serpent.

"I am tortured by thirst," answered the serpent, "and I am on the point of death. Pray, what have you in that jug?"

"I am carrying milk in this jug," answered the man.

"Pray give me some of the milk to drink,"

"Give the child to the second woman, she is the real mother"

begged the serpent, "and as a reward for your kindness I will show you a hidden treasure."

The man consented and gave the milk to the serpent. After the serpent finished drinking, he led the man to a great rock and said: "Under this rock lies the treasure." The man rolled the rock aside and as he was about to take the treasure, the serpent suddenly made a lunge at him, and coiled itself around his neck.

"What do you mean by this?" exclaimed the terrified man.

"I am going to kill you," replied the serpent, "because you attempted to rob me of all my money."

"Let us go to King Solomon," proposed the man, "and he will tell us which of us is in the right."

The serpent agreed to the man's proposal, and the man, with the serpent still wrapped around his neck, went to the king. The king heard the claims made by the man, and he said to the serpent: "Why do you wish to kill the man? You promised to give him the treasure."

"I desire to kill the man," answered the serpent, "because it was God's command to the serpent, 'Thou shalt bruise the heel of man.' "

"Before I render my decision," said Solomon to the serpent, "you must release your hold upon the man's neck and descend; in court neither party to a lawsuit must have an unfair advantage."

The serpent obeyed the king's command, and he glided down to the floor. Solomon then said to the serpent: "So you desire to kill the man because God said to the serpent: 'Thou shalt bruise the heel of man?' "

"Yes," replied the serpent firmly.

"And God's command to you," said the king turning to the man, "was to bruise the head of the serpent. Now, obey His command." And the man crushed the serpent's head.

3. *The Man with Two Heads*

Asmodeus, the king of the demons, once said to Solomon: "You are the wisest of men, yet I will show you something that you have never seen." Asmodeus then stretched forth his hand and fetched a man who had two heads and four eyes. The king became alarmed. He called for his chief adviser, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and showed him this wonderful creature.

"Please tell me who you are?" said the king to the double-headed man.

"I am one of the Cainites," answered the strange creature.

"Do the sun and the moon shine upon your land, as they do upon ours?" questioned Solomon.

"They do shine in our land," the man replied.

"Does the sun in your land rise in the east and set in the west as it does in ours?" asked Solomon further.

"No," said the Cainite. "In our land, the sun rises in the west and sets in the east."

The Cainite then expressed his desire to return to his land. Solomon asked Asmodeus to take the man back, but the king of the demons replied that he was unable to do so. So the double-headed man remained in the land of the Israelites and took for himself a wife who bore him seven sons. Six of these children resembled the mother, while one of them resembled the father, having likewise a double head and four eyes.

After some time the Cainite died, and a dispute arose among his sons as to the division of their father's property. The double-headed son claimed two portions, "Because," he said, "we are two persons and not one."

The case was brought before the Sanhedrin, the highest court of the land, but the court did not know how to decide it. The Sanhedrin brought the case before King Solomon, and, after praying to God to grant him wisdom, he said: "Fetch me a jug of boiling water, and I will determine for you whether this creature is one or two persons."

When the boiling water was brought before King Solomon, he began to pour it slowly upon one of the heads of the monster. Whereupon both mouths cried out at one and the same time: "We are dying, we are dying!"

"Now give this double-headed man but one share of the inheritance," ordered the king. The

Sanhedrin and all the attendants of the king marveled at the great wisdom of their king.

4. *The Thief Discovered*

One day three men were traveling together, and when Sabbath approached they halted and prepared to rest. As no money is allowed to be carried on one's person on the Sabbath, the men found a safe hiding place for their money. They trusted one another, and all three travelers hid their money in the same spot. When the Sabbath was over, they hastened to the spot, and discovered that the money had been stolen. It was clear that one of the three was the thief, for there was no other man about who knew of the hiding place; but which one had taken the money?

They appeared before King Solomon for trial. He said to them: "I know that you are men experienced in the ways of the world. I would like you to help me decide a very difficult case which was submitted to me by one of my vassal kings. This is the story:

"In one of the king's provinces, there lived a maiden and a youth. One day, the maiden and the young man promised one another under oath not to marry without obtaining first the other's permission. In the course of time, the young people were separated and the girl betrothed to a man whom she loved, but she refused to marry him until the companion of her youth gave his consent.

"She then took much gold and silver and together with her betrothed she set out to find the friend of her youth. After a long search she found him, and offered him a great sum of money if he would give his consent to her marriage to the man whom she now introduced to him.

" 'You can keep the gold and silver for yourself,' said the friend of her childhood, 'and I give you my best wishes and congratulations.' Now this young man loved the friend of his youth very much, but he sacrificed his own feelings for the sake of her happiness.

"The happy young couple thanked their friend heartily and started on the way home. On the road, they were surprised by an old highwayman, who was about to rob the young man of his money and of his bride. The girl told the highwayman the story of her life, and pleaded with him: 'If the friend of my youth has sacrificed his great love for me for the sake of my happiness, how much more should you, an old man, give up your evil intent, and let me go my way?' Her words touched the heart of the aged brigand, and he touched neither the girl nor the money.

"Now," continued Solomon, "the king wishes me to decide which of the three persons acted most nobly, the girl, the youth, or the highwayman, and I should like to hear your views on the question."

The three men were so elated by the honor bestowed upon them by the king that they forgot

their own dispute, and one of them said: "I admire the girl who kept her oath so faithfully."

The second one said: "The youth acted most nobly; for the sake of making happy the girl he loved, he sacrificed himself and allowed her to wed another."

"As for me, I give all the credit to the highwayman," said the third man. "He had the opportunity of taking both the girl and the money, but not only did he surrender the woman, but he also refrained from taking the money."

"This man admires the brigand," thought Solomon; "he praises the highwayman who abstained from taking the money. This proves that he himself is greedy for money." The king then cross-examined the man, who finally admitted that he had stolen the money, and pointed out the spot where he had hidden it.

5. *Wisdom Is Better than Wealth*

Three brothers once came to King Solomon and said: "Pray permit us to enter your service that we may profit by your wisdom." The king accepted the offer of their services and assigned them certain duties to perform. After thirteen years in the king's employ, the brothers said to one another: "We have left our families in the hope of learning something from the king, but we have gained nothing by our stay here."

The three brothers then appeared before the

king and asked for his permission to return to their homes. The king granted their request, and said to them: "Now each of you may have one hundred gold coins for your services, or, if you prefer, you may receive instead of the gold three maxims of sound advice from me."

They decided to take the money and set out for home. They had not gone very far from Jerusalem, when the youngest of the three said: "We have certainly acted unwisely in preferring gold to wisdom. Let us go back to the king, return the gold, and receive words of wisdom instead."

"We will not go back to the king," said the two elder brothers; "we need the money for our wives and children."

"Then you may go on," said the youngest brother, "but as for myself, I will return to the king."

The youngest of the three then hastened back to Solomon and said: "My lord, I took service under you to gain wisdom, and not to make money. Pray, take back the money, and teach me wisdom instead."

"Hearken now to these three rules of conduct," said the king to the youngest brother. "When you travel, set out on your journey at dawn, and turn in for the night when the sun sets. Never cross a river that the floods have swollen, and never confide a secret to a woman."

The man left the palace and quickly overtook

his brothers. They asked him about the wisdom he had acquired from the king, but he would tell them nothing. They journeyed on together. In the late afternoon, when the sun was about to set, they reached a spot suitable for spending the night. The youngest brother, mindful of the advice of the king, proposed to his brothers that they stop there.

"You talk nonsense," said the brothers. "We can make a good many miles before nightfall. Why stop here?"

"But you cannot tell whether you will find another place as good as this one to spend the night in," said the youngest brother.

The brothers laughed at him and at his wisdom and proceeded on their way, but the youngest brother stopped there and made arrangements to spend the night. When darkness came on, it grew very cold, but the youngest brother was warm and comfortable. His elder brothers were overtaken by a severe storm, in which they perished.

On the following day, the only surviving brother continued on his journey, and on the road he found the bodies of his dead brothers. He wept for them, then he dug graves at the roadside and buried them. He then took the gold coins which they had received from the king and proceeded on his way.

After that he reached a river which had become swollen as a result of the heavy storm. He remembered Solomon's advice and waited for the water

to subside. As he stood at the bank of the river, he observed that some of the king's servants were about to wade through the river. They were driving their beasts all laden with gold into the stream, when Solomon's pupil urged them to delay their crossing. In spite of the warning, the king's men attempted to ford the stream, were carried away by the flood and were drowned. After the water had abated, the remaining brother crossed the river, took the gold that was strapped on the drowned animals and proceeded on his way.

He reached home safely and displayed his wealth to his wife. She inquired of him where he had obtained so much gold, but he told her nothing of the experiences he had had. His wife did not desist, but wept and cried until her husband finally decided to confide his secrets to her. He told her how his brothers had met with their death on the road, and how he had taken the gold from the king's servants.

One day, during a quarrel with her husband, the woman ran out into the street and exclaimed: "Is it not enough that you have killed your two brothers, but you wish to kill me too?" His two sisters-in-law thereupon brought charges before the king against their brother-in-law for having murdered their husbands.

The man was tried, was found guilty of murder, and was ordered by the king to be executed for his crime.

"O my lord," wept the condemned man, "permit me to say a few words." And upon obtaining the king's permission, he said: "Once my two brothers and I served my lord for thirteen years, and when we left the royal palace, my brothers took gold as their reward, but I took three rules of conduct from my lord." The king said that he remembered the incident and requested that the condemned man tell him all that had occurred. The man related all that had happened, and the king said: "This man is not guilty; he made his wealth in a lawful manner." And then the king added: "Acquire wisdom; it is better than gold."

6. *The Advice of the Cock*

Once as King Solomon was going through his stables and barns, he heard the buck make a very funny remark to the ass, and when he left the stable he burst out in great laughter. The queen, daughter of the king of Egypt, happened to notice Solomon leaving the stable, and she said to him: "Pray tell me what made you laugh."

Now there is great danger connected with the knowledge of the language of animals and birds. If the one who understands their language should ever tell anybody one word that he hears from an animal, he would surely die. Solomon therefore would not tell the queen what he had heard the buck say. "It is only a trifle," the king said to the queen, "and it is not worth repeating." But the

queen insisted that she be told the trifle, and the more Solomon refused to disclose it, the more insistent she became. She even refused to come and have her regular meals at the table of the king, saying that she felt very sick at heart and that she was disappointed because the king refused to tell her the secret.

The king said to her: "I refuse to tell you the conversation of the animals, because it means the end of my days if I do tell it to you."

"You are not telling me the truth," answered the weeping queen. "You must tell me the secret; if you do not I shall surely die."

"If that is the case," said the king, "I shall tell you all about it. It is a long story and you must listen carefully.

"Once upon a time there lived a certain honest man in a large city on the sea coast. Before the man died he called for his only son and said to him: 'My son, I am going to die, and there is one request that I would like to make of you. After I die, I want you to go to the sea-shore every day and cast a loaf of bread into the sea.'

"Out of respect for his dying father, the son did not ask for the reason of this unusual request. And immediately after his father's death, he went day after day to the sea-shore and cast a large loaf of bread into the water.

"One of the small fishes of the sea was in the habit of coming to the place where the loaf of

bread would each day be thrown. The little fish would eat, at first, only a small part of the bread, then as it grew bigger and bigger, it ate more and more, until at last it was able to eat the whole loaf. And after that, even the whole loaf of bread was not sufficient for the fish, and it would swallow many small and even big fishes to satisfy its hunger.

"Leviathan, king of all sea-creatures, sent for two large whales and said to them: 'There is one naughty fish in my domains who dares swallow fishes that are weaker than himself. Go forth and bring that culprit before me.'

"The two whales brought the fish before Leviathan, who said to the prisoner: 'How dare you swallow your weak little brothers?'

" 'It is not my fault,' said the prisoner, 'but it is the fault of a certain man who daily throws a loaf of bread into the sea. I used to eat that loaf of bread every day until I grew very big and strong, and my appetite grew with me, until that little loaf of bread was no longer sufficient to satisfy my hunger. Therefore I was forced to swallow my weaker brothers to satisfy my terrible appetite.'

"The king of the fishes said: 'You are right; it is the fault of the man. Go therefore to the spot where the man comes daily, swallow him alive and bring him to me, so that we may hear what he has to say about himself.'

"Then the man was swallowed by the big fish

and when he was brought before Leviathan, the king of the fishes said: 'How dared you throw bread into the sea and make this fish so large that he requires many fishes to satisfy his ravenous appetite?'

" 'God is my witness that I have not done this with the intention of increasing the appetite of this fish,' said the terrified man. 'I have simply carried out the wish of my dying father, who had told me to throw a loaf of bread into the water, without giving any reason for his request.'

"Leviathan then said: 'I see that your intentions were not bad, and because I put you to trouble in bringing you here into the depths of the seas, I will teach you the language of animals and birds. But remember that there is great danger connected with this knowledge. If you ever tell others one word of what you hear from an animal, you will surely die.'

"The king of the fishes taught the man the language of fishes, animals and birds, and then he ordered the big fish to take the man back to the place from which he had been brought.

"After the man returned safely home, he overheard a conversation between his oxen and his bucks. The bucks asked the oxen: 'How fare you with these so-called people?'

" 'We pass our days and nights in painful toil,' replied the oxen.

"'We can give you relief, brothers,' said the bucks. 'If you take our advice, you will live in comfort, and rid yourselves of all hard work.'

"'O brothers,' exclaimed the oxen, 'pray, have pity on us and help us out. We promise to follow your advice.'

"'God knows that we speak nothing but the truth,' said the bucks. 'Our advice to you is to eat neither straw nor fodder this night. In the morning, when our master notices that your food was untouched, he will suppose that you are sick. He will not give you any work for the day, and you will have a good rest.'

"The oxen followed the advice of the bucks, and tasted none of the food that was thrown to them. The master suspected that the bucks were playing a trick upon the oxen. He arose in the middle of the night, went to the stable, and watched the bucks eat their fill from the manger of the oxen.

"Upon returning home, the master laughed loudly. His wife, amazed at the sudden outburst of laughter, said: 'What may be the cause of your laughing?'

"'Oh, just nothing,' said the husband; 'something silly has just occurred to me.'

"The master decided to punish the bucks for the trick they had played on the oxen. He ordered his servant to let the oxen rest for the day, and make the bucks do the work of the oxen.

"In the evening the bucks walked into the stable

tired and exhausted. The oxen greeted them and said: 'What is the matter, brothers?'

"'Why,' said the bucks, 'have you not heard what our heartless master has decided about you?'

"'No,' responded the frightened oxen.

"'We heard our master say that if you refuse to eat this night too, he would have you slaughtered,' said the bucks. 'He wishes to make sure of your flesh at least.'

"The oxen immediately threw themselves upon the food before them, and left not a speck behind. The master burst out in loud laughter. His wife insisted on knowing the cause of it. She swore that she would not live with him any more if he refused to tell her why he laughed. The man loved his wife and he decided to give up his life to satisfy her curiosity. Before taking leave of this world he wished to see his friends and relatives once more, and he invited them all into his house.

"In the meantime, all the domestic animals became aware of their master's approaching end. The faithful dog took it very much to heart and he touched neither food nor drink that day. The cock, on the other hand, was as gay as usual, and he and his wives ate up the dog's food. The master overheard the following conversation between the dog and the cock:

"'How ungrateful you are!' said the dog angrily. 'Our master is but a step away from the grave, and you eat and make merry.'

" 'Is it my fault that our master is a fool and an idiot?' replied the cock. 'I have ten wives, and I rule them as I will. Not one of them dares oppose me and my commands. Our master has but a single wife, and yet he cannot control and manage her.'

" 'What ought our master to do?' inquired the dog.

" 'Let him show his wife that he has some backbone,' said the cock, 'and I assure you she will not plague him any more to reveal his secret.'

"The cock's advice seemed good to the husband. He went to his wife and said to her: 'If you insist that I disclose my secret to you, great evil will befall you, and you will regret your insistence for you will be severely punished.'

"Thus did the man escape death by following the cock's advice."

The queen was ashamed when she heard this story, and asked King Solomon to pardon her for insisting that he tell her the secret.

7. *Not One Woman Out of a Thousand*

One day King Solomon uttered a wise saying in the presence of the learned Sanhedrin: "One faithful man among a thousand have I found; but a faithful woman among all these have I not found." The learned men were astonished at the statement made by the king, and Solomon said that he would prove to them that his statement was true. He

ordered some of his attendants to seek out a married couple who had the best reputation for faithfulness and virtue.

The attendants, after some time, came back with the report that they had found a married couple who enjoyed the best reputation, and that they loved one another with all their heart and soul. The king immediately ordered that the man be brought before him.

"Now," said Solomon to the husband when he was brought before him, "I was told that you are wise, learned and virtuous, and I therefore desire to appoint you to the exalted office of chief overseer of my palace, and to give you my daughter as a wife. But there is only one condition attached to my offer," added the king. "You must murder your wife to-night, so that you may be free to marry my daughter."

That evening the husband tasted neither food nor drink, for he was full of pity for his wife and little children. His wife asked him why he abstained from eating, but he gave some evasive reply. "I cannot kill my good wife when she is awake," thought the man. "In the nighttime, when she is fast asleep, I will do the king's wish, and become the king's son-in-law."

At night, when the woman was fast asleep, the husband approached her bed with drawn sword. But when he glanced at the simple loving face of his wife and saw one of his children enfolded in

the mother's arms, his affection for his wife overcame him. He drew back, replaced his sword in its sheath, saying to himself: "No, it cannot be; I cannot murder my good wife; I care not for glory and wealth; let her remain a mother to her innocent children."

In the morning, the husband was brought before King Solomon, who asked: "And where is the head of your wife that you promised to bring this morning?"

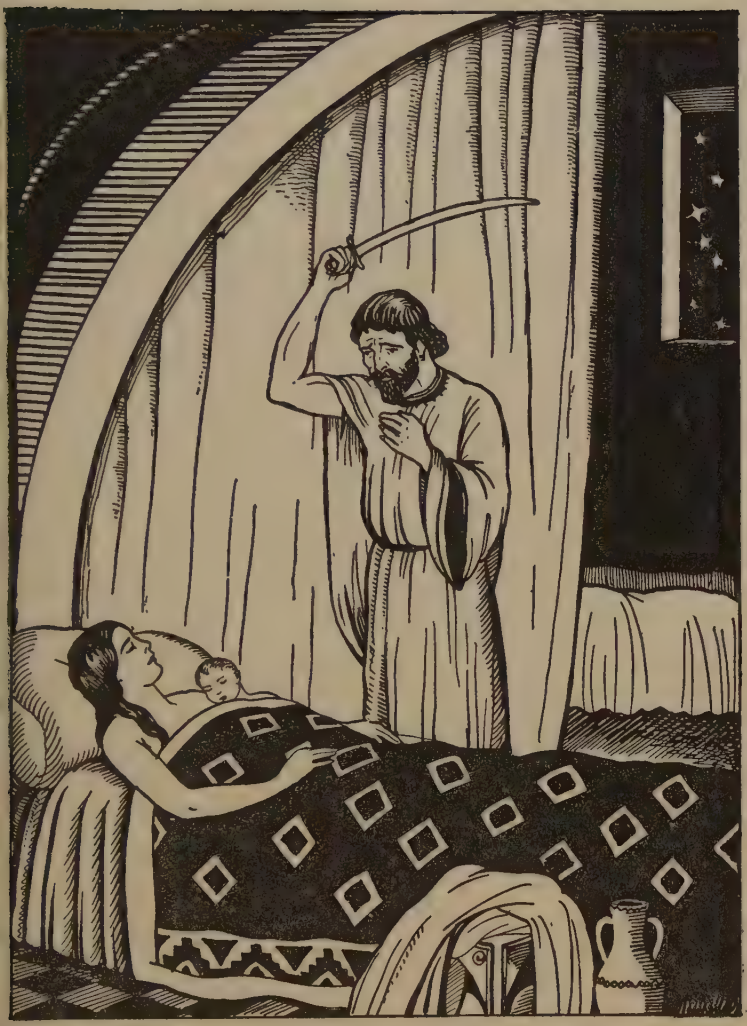
"O my lord," exclaimed the husband, "all the wealth and glory you possess, could not make me take the life of my good wife, who is the mother of my children."

Thereupon the husband was dismissed from the presence of the king and was ordered not to tell his wife one word of what had occurred.

After some time had elapsed, King Solomon called for the wife to appear before him, and said to her: "My dear woman, my love for you is very great. It is my wish to take you as my wife, and you shall be the first queen in my harem. There is one condition attached to this. You must murder your husband this evening and bring me his head in the morning."

The king thereupon gave her a thin leaden sword that could do no harm, and said to the woman: "With this sword you shall cut off your husband's head to-night."

The woman assured the king that she would



"No, it cannot be; I cannot murder my good wife!"

bring her husband's head the next morning, and she went home with the sword determined to carry out her promise.

At night, when her husband was fast asleep, the wife approached his bed, drew forth the leaden sword and struck her husband's neck with all her might. The leaden implement did no harm, but merely awakened her husband. He arose in astonishment, and saw his wife standing over him with a thin sword bent in two. Angrily he exclaimed: "Who gave you this sword, and why do you desire to kill me?" The woman then confessed her evil intent and told her husband what had passed between her and the king.

The next day both the man and his wife were brought before the king, who sat at the head of the Sanhedrin. Solomon ordered the husband to tell what had happened between him and his wife, and then the king commanded him to tell what had happened some time ago when the king had asked him to kill his own wife. When the learned men heard the story told by the husband, they all said: "Whatever our lord says, springs from profound wisdom."

THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

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THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

1. *Asmodeus in Chains*

HEN Solomon decided to build the Temple, he called together the wise men of the land, and said to them: "You well know that God forbids the use of iron tools in erecting an altar. Advise me, therefore, you learned men of Israel, how can I build the Temple without using iron tools."

The learned men replied: "On the sixth day of the creation of the world, toward twilight, the Lord our God created the shamir, the stone that splits rocks. The shamir was used by Moses to engrave the names of the tribes on the precious stones of the ephod worn by the high priest. But it has since been hidden, and no human being knows where it can be found. Now since our lord has power over all the demons, let our lord call them together and order them to give us information as to the whereabouts of the shamir."

King Solomon at once called together all the demons and he said to them: "I have been told that

you know where the shamir can be found. Now disclose this secret to me, lest, at a word from me, you all be destroyed."

"We do not possess that information," said the terrified host of demons. "We have no knowledge of the location of the shamir. But Asmodeus, our former king, may know its whereabouts."

"Where can Asmodeus be found?" asked the king.

"Asmodeus dwells in the Mountains of Darkness. He has dug a well there upon which he has placed a huge rock and which he has sealed with his own signet. Every day he goes up to heaven to take part in the discussions at the heavenly academy. Then he descends again to earth to be present at the debates at the earthly houses of learning. After that, he returns to his dwelling in the Mountains of Darkness. He examines the seal on the well, and if he finds that the seal has not been tampered with, he rolls off the huge rock and drinks of the water."

King Solomon took a chain, a gold ring upon which was engraved the name of God, a bundle of wool, and a jug of wine. He called for his most trusted man, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and said to him: "Take the chain, ring, wool, and wine and go to the Mountains of Darkness where Asmodeus dwells and bring him to me in fetters."

Arrived at the Mountains of Darkness, Benaiah discovered the well and bored a hole into it from

below so that all the water was drained out. He then stopped up the hole with wool, and bored another hole near the top of the well through which he filled the well with wine. He stopped up this hole too with wool, and then climbed a tall tree to see what would happen.

After a time Asmodeus came to the well, examined the seal, and finding it untouched, he rolled off the huge stone and bent down to drink. But to his astonishment he found wine instead of water, and he said: "My enemy, King Solomon, who deposed me from my throne, has said: 'Wine is a mocker, strong drink is riotous; and whosoever reeleth thereby is not wise.' (Prov. xx, 1.) Although this was said by my enemy, I shall heed his advice, for it is a wise saying." But his thirst became unbearable, and finally he drank of the wine until his senses were overpowered and he fell into a deep sleep. Benaiah at once came down from his hiding place and fastened the chain around the neck of Asmodeus. The king of the demons, on awakening, grew angry and tried to free himself, but Benaiah called to him: "Beware! The name of the Lord is upon you. Now," added Benaiah holding on to the other end of the chain, "follow me to the court of King Solomon, for he has a certain request to make of you."

The king of the demons permitted himself to be led by Benaiah. On the way to the court of Solomon, Asmodeus acted most peculiarly. He

brushed against a palm-tree and uprooted it; and he knocked against a house and overturned it. He was about to overthrow a hut belonging to a poor woman. The woman pleaded with him and said: "Pray do not upset my hut for I am a widow and very poor."

As he turned aside from her hut, 'Asmodeus broke a bone in his leg, whereupon he remarked: "My enemy, King Solomon, rightly said: 'And a soft tongue breaketh the bone.'" (Prov. xxv, 15.)

After that he saw a blind man going astray and he set him in the right path. He noticed a drunkard who seemed to be lost, and he set him too on the right path. When a wedding party passed them, Asmodeus wept.

"Why do you weep?" asked Benaiah.

"Because I know that the bridegroom has not a month to live," answered the demon.

Then Asmodeus heard a man say to his shoemaker: "Make me a pair of shoes to last me seven years." The king of the demons laughed.

"Why do you laugh now?" asked Benaiah.

"Because I know that the man will not live another seven days," replied the king of the demons.

Asmodeus then saw a magician who was showing his skill to the people of a certain town, and he laughed heartily.

"Now, why do you laugh?" asked Benaiah.

"The magician pretends to disclose secrets,"

replied the king of the demons, "and he knows not that a buried treasure is under his very feet."

Finally Benaiah arrived at Jerusalem with his prisoner, and after three days the king of the demons was led before Solomon. Asmodeus took a cane four ells long, and, throwing it before Solomon, remarked: "At the end of your days this will be the measure of your grave. Why then do you strive for greatness, and why did you trouble me to come to you from the end of the world?"

"It was not my intention to trouble you, nor to look for conquests," answered Solomon. "The Lord God has ordered me to build a Temple in His name, and I cannot build it without possessing the shamir. Tell me where the shamir can be found, and I shall set you free."

"The shamir is not in my possession," answered the demon. "It was given by God to the Angel of the Sea, and the Angel of the Sea has entrusted it to the moor-hen, who has taken an oath to watch the shamir carefully. The moor-hen carries the shamir with her to the mountains which are not inhabited by men. By means of it, she splits the mountains, and injects seeds, which grow and cover the naked rocks so that they can be inhabited.

2. *The Shamir Brought to Solomon*

Upon receiving this report from the king of the demons, Solomon called for one of his trustworthy servants and said to him: "Take this glass, go and

seek the nest of the moor-hen. When you find it, lay this glass over it."

The servant went forth to do the will of the king, and after a long search he found the nest of the moor-hen with little ones in it. He placed the glass, which had been given to him by Solomon, on the top of the nest, and he sat down at a distance to watch the outcome.

The moor-hen arrived with food for her little ones, but she was unable to break through the glass. She flew away and after some time she returned with the shamir in her mouth. She placed the shamir on the glass and the glass split in two. The king's servant had observed all this, and just at the right moment he so frightened the bird that she dropped the shamir and flew away. The man took possession of the stone and returned to Solomon. The moor-hen was so greatly distressed at having broken her oath to the Angel of the Sea that she killed herself.

Now when Solomon obtained possession of the wonderful shamir, he started the building of the Temple. It took seven years to construct it. During this period of time, not a single workman, who was employed about it, died or fell sick. After the dedication of the Temple, however, all the workmen died so that they might not build similar structures for the heathens and their gods. Their wages for building the Temple they were to receive from God in the world to come.

3. *The Dedication of the Temple*

When the Temple was completed, all the people gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the great event. King Solomon then ordered that the Ark be brought into the Holy of Holies. But the gates of the sacred chamber suddenly locked themselves, and the king's attendants were unable to open them.

Solomon offered twenty-four different prayers to God, but the gates still remained locked. He then said: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."

The gates to the sacred chamber wished to swallow King Solomon, saying: "Whom dost thou refer to as the 'King of glory?' "

"The Lord is strong and mighty," answered Solomon. But when the gates still refused to unlock themselves, Solomon continued: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and if you will ask me, 'Who is the king of Glory?' I will respond, 'The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory.' "

For all that, the gates remained locked and Solomon was unable to carry the Ark into the Holy of Holies. At last the king prayed to God thus: "O Lord, remember the good deeds of David Thy servant." As soon as Solomon mentioned the name of King David, the Holy of Holies opened of its

own accord. The enemies of David then had to admit that God had wholly forgiven him his sin.

Solomon made a dedication feast for the people, who danced and made merry to the sound of many bands of music. The wife of Solomon, the daughter of the king of Egypt, made a feast also, at which she had her attendants play upon a thousand different musical instruments which she had brought with her from her home, and the names of the Egyptian idols were mentioned aloud by the queen. The rejoicing at the queen's feast, at which the king was present by invitation, surpassed the rejoicing at the dedication feasts. The voices of the queen's singers drowned out the holy voices of the Levites, who were singing hymns to God. God became wroth with Solomon and said: "A time will come, when this city will be destroyed and the Temple will be consumed by flames."

At night, when Solomon went to sleep, he took the key of the Temple and put it under his pillow. His heathen wife, the daughter of the king of Egypt, spread over the bed of Solomon a piece of tapestry studded with pearls and diamonds, which gleamed and glittered like the constellations in the sky. Whenever Solomon wished to rise, he saw these stars, and thinking it was still night, he slept on until the fourth hour after dawn.

Meantime the people had gathered around the Temple and were waiting for the king to come with the key so that the priests might begin the

service at the Temple. They murmured against Solomon for delaying the regular service of God. Solomon's mother, Bath-sheba, immediately entered the chamber of the king, aroused him from his sleep, and rebuked him with the words: "It does not become the king to drink wine." Solomon thanked his mother for arousing him from his sleep. He admitted to her that he had been wrong in allowing himself to be influenced by his heathen queen, the daughter of the king of Egypt.

"My son," said Bath-sheba, "all know that your father David was a God-fearing man, and now people will say, 'Solomon is the son of Bath-sheba, it is his mother's fault if he goes astray.' When your father was alive, the prophet Nathan announced in the name of God that a son would be born to the king whose name would be Solomon, and that he would be worthy of succeeding King David. Each of your father's wives made vows and offered prayers that a son worthy to reign over Israel be born to her. I, too, prayed and made a vow that if Solomon were born to me, I would bring him up so that he would bring peace to his people and to the whole world. My prayer was accepted by God and he gave me a son worthy to reign over Israel and to build God's Temple; but now this son of mine is forgetting the Lord who gave him wisdom and greatness and is pursuing after vanity."

When Solomon left the palace of the daughter

of the king of Egypt to go to the Temple, he was met by Jeroboam of the tribe of Ephraim, who was accompanied by eighty thousand men.

"What is your desire?" asked King Solomon of Jeroboam.

"My lord is king over Israel," replied Jeroboam, "and all Israel looks up to him. Now if he so lightly esteems the service at the Temple on the very first day of its dedication, it surely shall be lightly esteemed by his subjects."

God thereupon said to Jeroboam: "Thou shalt have a taste of the kingship, and thou wilt see whether thou wast justified in rebuking the king or not."

THE GREATNESS OF SOLOMON

THE GREATNESS OF SOLOMON

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THE GREATNESS OF SOLOMON

1. *His Throne*

HE throne of Solomon was no less magnificent than the Temple itself. No one before his time and no one since could produce a work of art like that of the throne. When kings and princes saw the beautiful structure, they fell down in astonishment and praised God. The throne was covered with fine gold and studded with emeralds, rubies, pearls and all manner of gems. It had six steps, and on each step there were two golden lions and two golden eagles, a lion and an eagle to the left and a lion and an eagle to the right. The pairs stood face to face, so that the right paw of the lion was opposite the left wing of the eagle, and his left paw was opposite the right wing of the eagle.

On the first step leading to the royal seat crouched a golden ox, and opposite him a golden lion. On the second step crouched a golden wolf, and opposite him a golden lamb. On the third step crouched a golden leopard, and opposite him

a golden goat. On the fourth step perched a golden eagle, and opposite it a golden peacock. On the fifth step crouched a golden cat, and opposite him perched a golden cock. On the sixth step perched a hawk, and opposite him a sparrow. At the very top rested a dove with her claws set on a hawk. Over the seat hung a candlestick, with seven branches extending from each side. On the branches at the right were the images of the seven patriarchs of the world, Adam, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Job. On the branches at the left were engraved the images of the seven pious men of the world, Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses, Aaron, Eldad and Medad. Attached to the top of the candlestick was a golden bowl filled with the purest olive oil, to be used for the candlestick in the Temple. To the base of the candlestick was attached a golden basin, also filled with the purest olive oil, to be used for the candlestick over the throne. On this basin was engraved the image of the high priest Eli, and on the faucets protruding from the basin were engraved the images of his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, and on the tubes, connecting the faucets with the basin, were engraved the images of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron.

On the upper part of the throne there were two seats, one for the high priest and one for his vicar. There also stood seventy golden chairs for the seventy members of the Sanhedrin, who took their

seats to the right and to the left of the king when they judged the people.

The machinery of the throne was put in motion as soon as Solomon set his foot on the first step. The golden ox arose and put the king on the second step, and then he was conducted from step to step by the beasts guarding it, until he reached the sixth step where the eagles received him and placed him upon his seat. A great eagle set the royal crown upon Solomon's head, as soon as he was seated. Thereupon a huge golden snake rolled itself up against the machinery, forcing all the lions and the eagles upward until they encircled the head of the king. Then a golden dove came down from a pillar, took the sacred scroll out of an ark and gave it to the king.

Solomon, together with the high priest and the Sanhedrin, judged the people and decided all cases that were brought to them. When there was any suspicion as to the truth of the statement made by a witness, the machinery of the throne was set in motion by the king. He touched one of the buttons of the huge snake, and the ox lowed, the lion roared, the wolf howled, the lamb bleated, the leopard growled, the cat mewed, the cock crowed, the hawk screeched, and the sparrow chirped. By the commotion thus raised the witness was terrified and refrained from giving false testimony.

2. *King Solomon and the Queen of the Ants*

Solomon had a magic carpet, sixty miles square, on which he flew so swiftly through the air that he could eat breakfast in Damascus and supper in Media. The four chiefs among the king's attendants carried out his orders whenever he desired to take a ride through the air. Asaph ben Berachiah among men, Ramirat among demons, the lion among beasts, and the eagle among birds took hold of the four ends of the carpet, raised it slightly, and up went the magic carpet into the air with Solomon and myriads of attendants upon it. It carried Solomon on the wings of the wind wherever he wished to go.

One day, it happened that a feeling of pride came over King Solomon while he was sailing through the air on his magic carpet. He said to himself: "There is no one like me; upon no one else has God bestowed so much wisdom, knowledge and power." Immediately the wind stopped blowing for an instant, one end of the magic carpet slid down, and forty thousand men dropped from the carpet. Solomon was greatly grieved and he addressed the wind: "Awake, O wind, and carry me on your wings again."

"If you will return to God, and subdue your pride," answered the wind, "I, too, will return and do your bidding."

Solomon repented his sin, and the wind carried him on its wings again.

Once while flying on the magic carpet, King Solomon passed the valley of ants. He heard one ant exclaim to the others: "Withdraw you ants, lest you be crushed by the armies of Solomon." The king halted in his flight and angrily asked the ant: "Who are you to give orders to the ants?"

"I am the queen of the ants," replied the ant.

"I desire to ask you an insignificant question," said Solomon.

"If you desire to ask aught of me," replied the ant, "then place me on the palm of your hand, so that you do not stand higher than I do."

Solomon stooped down and placed the ant on the palm of his hand; then the ant said: "Now you can ask your question."

"Is there any one in this world greater than I am?" asked Solomon.

"Yes," replied the queen, "there is one greater than you."

"And who may it be?" asked the astonished king.

"Even I am greater than you," retorted the queen.

"How is that possible?" questioned Solomon.

"Were I not greater than you," stated the queen, "God would not have led you to this place to put me on the palm of your hand."

Angered by this retort, Solomon threw the

queen to the ground, and said: "Do you not know who I am? I am Solomon, the son of David, and king of Jerusalem."

Not frightened by Solomon's words, the queen of the ants said: "I know that you are dust and to dust will you return."

The king left the valley of ants very much abashed and with his pride greatly subdued.

3. *The Golden Palace*

One day, Solomon and thousands of his men seated themselves on the magic carpet, and Solomon ordered the wind to carry them on its wings to the remotest part of the world. For seven days and seven nights the carpet flew in the air, until it came to a magnificent palace made of pure gold. Here Solomon halted, descended to the ground, and he and Asaph ben Berachiah sought to enter the golden palace; but in vain; no entrance leading into the palace could be found.

Thereupon Solomon called Ramirat, the captain of the demons, and said to him: "Call together your great host of demons and let them ascertain if there is any man, beast or bird to be found within this palace."

At a sign of the captain, demons in great hosts surrounded the golden palace. After they had made a long search, Solomon asked Ramirat: "What is your report?"

"My hosts came upon no living creature in the

palace," replied the captain of the demons, "except an eagle that has his nest on the roof."

Solomon thereupon summoned the eagle, and inquired of him: "How old are you?"

"I am seven hundred years old," replied the eagle.

"Do you possess any knowledge as to the location of the entrance to this palace?" asked King Solomon.

"I do not possess such knowledge," replied the eagle; "but my older brother may know something about it."

Then Solomon called for the eagle's older brother and he said to him: "How old are you?"

"I am one thousand and three hundred years old," replied the aged eagle.

"Do you know where the entrance to this palace is?" asked the king.

"I have never seen the entrance myself," replied the old eagle. "But I remember having heard my father say that there was a door on the west side of the palace, but that it had been covered up by the dust of the ages that had elapsed since it was last used."

Solomon thereupon ordered the wind to scatter the dust to the four corners of the earth, and an iron door was disclosed underneath, which bore the following inscription: "We, who dwell in this palace, have lived in pleasure and luxury for many years. Now a famine has broken out and we have

ground pearls into flour instead of wheat; but to no avail. So now that we are about to die from hunger we leave this palace as an abode for the eagles." Solomon then found another inscription on the door: "He who has neither reigned nor prophesied shall not enter this palace."

The king discovered a niche on the right side of the gate in which there was a glass receptacle containing a key. With this key he opened a gate made of pure gold, and on entering the palace he inspected the wonderful building, the apartments of which were constructed of pearls and precious stones.

In one of the chambers, Solomon saw a number of statues, among them one that looked as though it were alive. Above the door of this chamber there was this inscription: "The king who dwelt in this palace was very powerful, and was always happy, but death came and took him away in the prime of his life." Solomon approached the lifelike statue and touched it. Immediately, it called out in a loud voice: "Hither, ye sons of Satan, the hand of a mortal has touched me." Suddenly there arose a great noise among the statues, and the sons of Satan threatened to take the life of Solomon.

"Away, ye sons of Satan!" called out the king angrily. "Do you not know that I am Solomon, your king?"

Quiet was restored, and the sons of Satan were

so terrified that they ran into the sea and were drowned. From the neck of the lifelike statue Solomon took a silver plate upon which were inscribed characters he could not read. Solomon in despair searched for a learned man to read the inscription. Finally he found a youth from the desert who read the inscription for him: "I, Shadad ben Ad, have slain a million heroes; have ruled over many thousand provinces; and have had a thousand kings under me; but when the Angel of Death approached me, I was powerless."

Solomon was impressed by the words of King Shadad, and all trace of pride left him.

4. *No One Can Frustrate God's Plan*

Keziah, one of the daughters of King Solomon, was a maiden of great beauty and profound wisdom. The king was very fond of her and therefore he was anxious to know to whom she would be wedded. At the request of Solomon, the high priest asked of the Urim and Thummim who her husband would be, and the reply was: "A very poor youth will marry thy daughter."

Solomon was displeased with the information. He called for fifty of his most trustworthy attendants and said to them: "Now I wish to entrust you with a secret mission; if you disclose it to any living being, you shall each of you die a horrible death. Take one of my largest ships, journey to the farthest of my islands, and there build a high

tower without doors or entrances, surrounded by a very high wall. Your departure and your return shall not be known to any man. When the tower is completed, furnish it with costly furniture, and then return to me."

After a time the fifty men returned to Jerusalem, and reported to the king that the tower with the high wall around it was completed, and they showed the king the plan of the tower. The king was pleased with the work. He bade the men return to him after two weeks.

During that time Solomon informed his daughter Keziah that she would go shortly on a long journey to some unknown destination, where she would have to remain for an indefinite length of time. He advised her to provide herself with wearing apparel and other necessities so that she might lack for nothing while there. Solomon expected his daughter to protest against such solitary confinement, but to his surprise she gayly told him that she was ready to go wherever her royal father might see fit.

After two weeks the king told the fifty men to whom he had confided the secret mission to get ready to depart with his daughter to the island where the tower was built. He told them to take enough food with them to last the princess for several months and to leave the food in the tower, for his daughter was to remain there in solitary confinement for an indefinite period of time.

The large eagle daily carried food to the princess in the tower

Arrived at the tower, the fifty men stored it with a huge quantity of food, and they brought the beautiful Keziah to the top of the tower by means of a ladder. They left her there and took the ladder away with them in their ship. There the princess lived in solitude for many days, and all that she could do was to ascend to the top of the tower and examine the rough sea around the island.

After a few months Solomon summoned the largest of all the eagles, and said to him: "You are to come daily into my main cuisine, and from there you are to take the best of food and drink and convey it to my daughter Keziah who is confined in a tower on the farthermost island of the sea." The eagle fulfilled the king's command, and the princess obtained her daily food from the cuisine of the king.

Now in those days, there lived a poor man in Accho who had a son, named Reuben. Reuben possessed great knowledge and learning, and was very handsome in appearance. As the lad's poor father was unable to provide for his children, Reuben left his home and wandered aimlessly about to look for some work whereby he could earn enough to support himself and help his family.

One cold night, Reuben happened to be wandering in the wilderness. He could find no place to rest his head. The night grew colder and

colder and the poor lad had no shelter from the cold where he might lie down and keep warm until the morning. As he looked about, he discovered the torn carcass of an ox on the ground. In this he lay down to keep warm. When he was fast asleep, a large vulture came, fastened his talons in the carcass and carried it, with the lad stretched out in it, to the roof of the tower in which the princess lived. The bird ate some of the flesh of the carcass and then flew back to the wilderness leaving Reuben on the roof still fast asleep.

In the early morning, the princess, as was her custom, ascended to the roof of the tower to look out upon the sea. To her amazement she saw a carcass of an ox and, upon closer examination, a youth lying in it. She awakened him from his sleep and said: "Who are you, and who has brought you hither?"

"I am an Israelite from Accho," replied the dumbfounded youth. "I wandered away from the house of my parents to look for work to support my poor parents and myself. Last night when it grew intensely cold, I could find no place where I might keep warm and rest my head, so I lay down in the carcass of the ox, and now I am here."

The princess was astonished when she heard this tale from the youth, and she as well as the youth arrived at the conclusion that he must have been carried to the roof of the tower by a huge

bird. She took pity on the poor lad, and showed him a chamber where he could wash himself and put on new clothes. Then it appeared that he possessed extraordinary beauty, deep learning and great knowledge. The princess invited him to remain in the palace with her, for it was impossible to descend from the tower, and since no ship ever passed the island, there was no way for him to leave.

The eagle who brought the princess her daily food, now noticed that there was somebody else in the tower with the princess, and from then on he brought double portions of food from the king's cuisine.

Keziah and Reuben grew very fond of one another, and at the proposal of the princess they became husband and wife. Reuben opened one of his veins and wrote the marriage contract with his own blood, and he called upon God and the archangels Michael and Gabriel to witness the ceremony.

After several years, the eagle that brought the daily food to the tower noticed that a baby had been added to the family in the tower, and from that time on he would bring food enough for three persons.

Many years passed and one day the king summoned the eagle and asked him about the princess in the tower. The eagle replied that the princess, her husband and their baby were all in good

health. The king was not a little surprised at the report of the eagle, and he immediately set out to visit his beloved daughter. The princess admitted that she was married, and introduced her husband and her baby to the king. Solomon was very much pleased with his son-in-law, for although Reuben was poor yet he distinguished himself in wisdom and learning. Upon learning of the remarkable manner in which the youth had come to the tower, Solomon said: "Now I see that none can frustrate the will of the Almighty."

Solomon brought the happy couple and their child to Jerusalem, where a great banquet was given in their honor, and their wedding anniversary was celebrated with great pomp.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

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THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

1. *In the City of Kitor*

ING SOLOMON ruled not only over men, but also over the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea, the demons and the spirits. He understood the language of all of them and could converse with them.

When the king was of good cheer and desired to entertain his visitors and his vassal kings who came from all over the world to see his greatness, he summoned the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the demons and spirits to perform their dances before the assembly. Once it happened that the cock of the prairie was missed from among the assembled birds of the air, and could nowhere be found. The king was very angry at the disobedience of the cock of the prairie, and commanded that he be brought before him for punishment. The eagles flew off in search of him and brought him before Solomon.

"Why did you fail to respond to my call?" asked Solomon wrathfully.

"O lord, king of the world, pray listen to my words," pleaded the cock of the prairie. "Three months ago I made a certain resolution. I desired to know if there was any domain in this world which did not know of my lord, the king, nor paid him tribute. I have eaten no food and have drunk no water for ninety days and ninety nights, and I have flown about in the whole world in order to find such a kingdom. At last I found a city, the city of Kitor, in the far East. There gold is less valuable than dust, and silver is as plentiful as the mud of the earth. The parks and orchards there have been in existence since the creation of the world, and are watered by the rivers flowing from the Garden of Eden. The people there are always happy, and live in peace; they know not how to fight, nor do they know how to shoot with bow and arrow. Their ruler is a woman who is called the Queen of Sheba. This kingdom is the only one that is not ruled over by my lord the king. Now if it please you, O lord and king, I shall fly back to that city, fetter their rulers with chains, and bring them before my lord the king."

Solomon thereupon called for his clerks, and had them write a letter to the Queen of Sheba, which read: "From me, King Solomon! Peace be with you, and peace be with all your people! Be it known to you that God has appointed me king over the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fishes of the seas, the demons and the spirits.

If you will come and do me homage, I will show you great honor, more than I have shown any of the kings that acknowledge my overlordship. Should you fail to come and pay me homage, I shall send my great armies against you. Should you ask, 'Who are these armies of King Solomon?' I should tell you: 'The birds of the air are my cavalry, the beasts of the field and the demons and the spirits are my legions.' At my beck and call they shall swarm over your land, and no one shall be able to rise up against them."

This letter the clerks of the king tied to the wing of the cock of the prairie. The bird rose skyward, uttered his cry, and flew away, followed by all the other birds.

When the birds came to Kitor, it was morning and the queen had gone forth to worship the sun. Suddenly the light of the sun was darkened by the vast flock of birds. The queen raised her head and exclaimed: "Alas, what has happened this morning that I cannot behold the sweet light of the sun?" Then the cock of the prairie alighted near her, and when she saw that a letter was tied to his wing, she unfastened it and read it.

The Queen of Sheba was greatly disturbed by the contents of the letter, and she rent her clothes in great anguish. She sent for her advisers and elders and read the letter to them. They were not much moved by the words of King Solomon and said to the queen: "We know nothing of King

Solomon, and his dominion we regard as naught." But the queen was not satisfied with the words of her advisers. She gathered all her ships and loaded them with gold, pearls and precious stones. In addition, she sent to Solomon six thousand youths and maidens, born in the same year, and in the same month, on the same day, and in the same hour. All were of equal size and stature, and were clothed in purple garments. She gave them a letter to King Solomon which read: "From the city of Kitor to the land of Israel is a journey of seven years. But in order to hear your wisdom, I will not rest on my way but make haste and be in Jerusalem at the end of three years."

2. *The Queen of Sheba Arrives in Jerusalem*

When the time for the arrival of the Queen of Sheba drew near, Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada to meet her. As the queen was riding in her chariot she saw at a distance something which seemed like a beautiful lily growing in a brook of water. As she drew nearer, it seemed to change into the appearance of the evening star that outshines all others. As she drew still nearer, the apparition changed again and looked like the flush in the eastern sky at break of day. When she came close to the object she saw that it was nothing else but Benaiah with his army of men. The queen descended from her chariot to do Benaiah honor, and when she was beside him, Benaiah

asked her: "Why did your majesty descend from the chariot?"

"Why, are you not King Solomon?" she asked in return.

"I am not King Solomon," replied Benaiah; "I am merely one of the servants that stand in his presence."

Then the queen turned to her nobles and said: "If we have not beheld the lion, we have at least seen his lair; if we have not beheld King Solomon, we have at least seen the beauty of him that stands in his presence."

Solomon prepared to receive the queen in a house made of glass. As Benaiah conducted her before the king, it appeared to her that the king was floating on water. As she stepped across to the king she raised her garment to keep it dry.

The Queen of Sheba then said to King Solomon: "I have heard of you, O king, and of your wisdom; will you now answer me if I ask you some riddles?"

The king replied: "The Lord giveth wisdom."

The queen: "What kind of water is that which does not descend from on high, nor comes from the depths or from the rocks; at times it is sweeter than honey, at other times bitter as gall, although it always flows from the same source?"

Solomon: "It is tears."

The queen: "Tell me who is the wretch that is buried while he is still alive? The more he rots the

more life he obtains; and they that buried him receive a manifold reward!"

Solomon: "It is a grain of seed."

The queen: "The dead lived, the grave moved, and the dead prayed!"

Solomon: "Jonah swallowed by the whale."

The queen: "Who was he that was born and died not?"

Solomon: "Elijah."

The queen: "What was that which was not born, yet life was given to it?"

Solomon: "The golden calf."

The queen asked Solomon many more riddles and he answered them all. She then ordered that the six thousand youths and girls she had brought from her land be summoned before Solomon, and pointing to them said to the king: "Now tell me which of them are male and which are female?"

The king ordered a basin full of water to be placed before each and every one of the youths and the girls. All of them were to wash their hands and faces, and no towels were given them to dry themselves with. The girls immediately wiped their hands and faces with their aprons as they were wont to do, while the boys were at a loss. The king then ordered that a great quantity of nuts and candy be given to the strangers, and that each and every one be given more than their hands could hold. The males at once raised their skirts and piled up in the fold the nuts and

candy they could not hold in their hands, while the females were ashamed to do so and took merely whatever their palms could hold. King Solomon thus separated the males from the females, and said to the queen: "These are males and those are females."

Then the queen said to Solomon: "Verily, your wisdom excels the fame thereof. Blessed be your God."

3. *The Mysterious Box*

One day Solomon and the Queen of Sheba were riding on horseback in the suburbs of Jerusalem, and when they came to a very beautiful field they alighted and sat down to rest. There they heard the sweet voice of a woman singing merrily of her joy in her husband and children, and of her great happiness to which even the happiness of King Solomon could not be compared. The Queen of Sheba then turned to Solomon and said: "You said that you have not found one good woman among a thousand; now here is such a woman."

"Is it your desire that I test this woman?" asked the king. "If so, let us enter the house of the happy family and we will put her to the test."

The farmer and his wife were greatly surprised upon seeing the two sovereigns approaching their humble house. They were put at ease, however, when the king greeted them kindly as he entered the house. The king then said: "I will return

toward evening, for I wish to leave something in your possession for several days."

Thereupon Solomon took a golden box, put a little white mouse into it together with some crumbs of bread, and said to the Queen of Sheba: "This will test the happy woman; we shall see whether she is really one out of a thousand."

Toward evening the two rulers returned to the house of the happy farmer and his wife, and King Solomon said to them: "Here I put this small golden box in a corner of your room. It should remain in this place for three days and three nights. You shall neither move it about nor open it. If you will obey my command, you shall be rewarded by me royally; should you disobey me, you will forfeit your lives." And turning to the husband, Solomon said: "Here is the key with which I have locked this little box. Keep it with you until I return three days hence." The two rulers took leave of the happy couple and returned to Jerusalem.

At the evening meal, the woman said to her husband: "I wonder what the king has hidden in this mysterious box? Has he filled it with precious stones, or has he put in it some mysterious things with which he practices witchcraft?"

"Why think about the box?" said the husband. "Let it remain there until the king comes back, and let us attend to our business just as before."

On the following day, when the husband

returned from his work at midday, the woman would taste no food and drink no water, and when her husband noticed her behavior, he asked: "Why do you not eat or drink? Have you received any bad news from your parents, or has anything untoward happened?"

"Cursed be the moment in which the king entrusted this mysterious box to our possession!" cried out the woman. "All night long I was unable to sleep, and in the morning when I closed my eyes in sleep, I was haunted by dreadful dreams and visions. Ah, if I only knew what this box contains!"

"Why talk about the box?" asked the husband in despair. "Do you not know that we shall forfeit our lives even if we only move that box about? Try to forget it, and let us have peace in the house."

In the evening when the husband returned from his work in the field, he found his wife lying in bed crying and weeping. He was very much grieved, and he approached her and said: "What has happened to you, my good wife? Do you really wish that the two of us forfeit our lives to the king? Pray, forget the box."

"If you are really anxious for my welfare," said the woman weeping bitterly, "then let us go over to that box, and let me peep through the keyhole. To tell you the truth, while you were away in the field, I approached the box several times with

the intention of examining it. But great terror overtook me and I refrained from coming close to it. Now, the king has only commanded us neither to move the box nor to open it, but he did not tell us not to look at it and examine it. Come then, let us just examine it."

The couple went over to the corner where the mysterious box stood, and the inquisitive woman peeped through the keyhole but saw nothing. She put her ear next to the keyhole, but heard nothing. She then exclaimed: "There is no use, we cannot tell what the box contains unless we open it."

"What!" exclaimed the husband in great terror. "Do you not realize that it means death for the two of us, if we open it? You had better go to bed, and forget all about it."

The following day, while the husband was working in the field, his oldest son called for him, saying that his mother was dying, and that she wished to talk to her husband before she passed away. When they reached home, the husband found his wife lying in bed weeping bitterly. She turned to her husband and said: "For two days and two nights I have tasted no food and have drunk no water. Oh, what horrors are haunting me! Demons and evil spirits are constantly jumping out of that little box, threatening to choke me. One of them even jumped on my bed and said to me: 'If you do not open that box and release me, I

will choke you and tear you apart limb by limb.' I am going to be killed by the evil spirits, if I do not open that box, so please let me open it just a trifle. I will just peep into it and close it at once again. Nobody will know anything about it, not even Solomon himself, and my life will be saved."

The sobs and supplications of the woman moved the heart of her husband, and he exclaimed: "Before this accursed little box came into our possession, we lived a happy life; now life has become intolerable. Come, I will open that box to satisfy your ridiculous dreams and boundless curiosity. I am ready to die to satisfy you."

He took the box and brought it over to the table. He opened it with the key that had been given to him by Solomon, but no sooner had he lifted the lid than the little white mouse jumped out and vanished somewhere in the house. Nothing else was to be seen in the box.

"It is all your fault," cried the disappointed woman. "I told you to open it but a little and you opened it wider. If you had listened to me, the mouse would not have escaped."

"I admit it was my fault," said the husband. "I should not have listened to you at all."

On the third day Solomon and the Queen of Sheba came to reclaim the box. They were met by the woman, who was weeping bitterly: "Pray my lord and king, forgive me, for it was not I who opened the box. Oh, pray spare my life!"

"It is indeed my fault," said the husband. "I allowed myself to be persuaded by a woman and so forfeited my life. Now I am ready to die. Spare this woman, for I alone opened it and not she."

"Tell the queen and myself the whole truth, and no harm shall befall you," said the king. "For it was not my intention to disturb the peace of your house, I simply wished to test you."

The honest farmer then told the two potentates all that had occurred between him and his wife from the time the box had been left in his possession up to the time it was opened. The wife agreed that all her husband said was true. When the Queen of Sheba heard the story she said: "Verily, King, you are as wise as an angel of God."

SOLOMON AND ASMODEUS

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SOLOMON AND ASMODEUS

1. *Asmodeus King of Jerusalem*

LTHOUGH Asmodeus had been captured by Solomon only for the purpose of obtaining the shamir, the king kept him a long time after the completion of the Temple. One day, Solomon said to Asmodeus, while they were both alone in the room: "You demons boast of your great and wonderful powers. If your king can be held prisoner by a mortal, wherein really lies your strength and greatness?"

"If you will but remove this chain from me and give me your ring upon which is engraved the Name of God, I will show you wherein my greatness lies," replied the king of the demons.

Solomon at once removed the chain from Asmodeus and gave him his protecting ring. The demon then stood before the king with one of his wings touching heaven and the other reaching to the earth. He snatched up Solomon, who had parted with his protecting ring, and flung him a distance of four hundred parasangs from Jerusalem.

Asmodeus then put on the king's crown, ascended the throne and, concealing his wings, he assumed the form of Solomon. He called for the attendants of the king and said to them: "I could no longer bear the presence of Asmodeus, king of the demons, so I drove him away to a far-off desolate land, from which he can never come back. From now on, Benaiah ben Johaiada shall no longer appear in my presence, until I give him word."

The attendants bowed in obedience to the supposed king who had ascended the throne and who remained for some time ruler over Israel.

2. *Solomon as Beggar*

Solomon, having recovered from the shock of his flight and fall, looked about him. He saw nothing but waste land. Unprotected from the beasts of the desert, and without food and drink, he wandered about for several days until at last he met some shepherd boys, and he asked them: "Pray tell me, is this place very far from Jerusalem, where Solomon, son of David, is king?"

"We have never heard of such a city," replied the youngsters, "nor have we ever heard of such a king."

Solomon then met an old man coming from the field. To him he put the same question, and the old man, too, replied that he had never heard of such a city nor of such a king. Solomon was aston-

ished and he said to himself: "And I really thought there was not a place on this earth where my name and fame were unknown. Now I see that I was mistaken."

Solomon then came upon the home of a Jewish family, and upon entering the house he said to them: "Do not regard my old clothes and my torn shoes, for I am really Solomon, king of Jerusalem. But misfortunes have befallen me and now I am wandering about begging for food."

The people laughed at him and said: "It is too bad about you, poor fellow. Not only did God deprive you of means of support, but He also deprived you of your mind." They gave him food and drink, and the banished king wandered on further, telling everybody that he was the king of Jerusalem, only to be taken everywhere for a lunatic by the incredulous people.

One day, Solomon met an old acquaintance, who was a rich and well-known man. The rich man recognized the king, gave him new garments and sandals, and made a feast in honor of Solomon. At the meal the host constantly reminded Solomon and the guests of the magnificence and splendor he had seen at the court of the king. These reminders moved the king to tears, and he left the man's house weeping bitterly.

The following day he came upon a poor man who addressed him thus: "I know that you are King Solomon in disguise, for I have had the

great honor of seeing you in Jerusalem. Would you not honor me, O lord my king, and break bread under my roof?" Solomon followed the man into the house. All the poor man could offer his guest was a dish of greens. The poor man noticed Solomon's grief, and said to him: "O my lord and king, the Lord, God of Israel, has sworn to David that the royal dignity will never depart from his house. Despair not therefore, my lord, for our good God will surely restore you to your kingdom and glory, and your name will once more resound from one end of the world to the other."

The dejected king was greatly encouraged by the words of the poor man, and was very grateful to him. He then thought of the great feast given in his honor by the rich man who had only put salt on his wounds by reminding him of his former glory. And Solomon said: "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

3. *Solomon Restored to His Kingdom*

For three years King Solomon was an outcast, because he had transgressed three commandments of God—"The king set over thee . . . shall not multiply horses to himself . . . neither shall he multiply wives to himself; neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold." (Deut. xvii, 16-17.) King Solomon begged from door to door, saying, "I am Solomon, king of Israel!" But the

people mocked him, for they were certain that King Solomon was sitting in state on his throne in Jerusalem.

One day the royal wanderer came to the capital city of Ammon, where he found himself in dire need. But the master cook of the king's house took pity on Solomon and made him his assistant. After Solomon had worked in the kitchen for some time, he one day cooked some meats for the king; and when the king tasted the meats Solomon had baked, he was well pleased, and he raised Solomon to the post of chief cook.

Naamah, the daughter of the king of Ammon, saw Solomon from day to day, and she fell in love with the cook. She went to her mother and said: "I shall die of a broken heart, unless I am given the head cook as husband."

The queen was astonished and ashamed and said to the princess: "There are kings, princes and nobles in Ammon; marry whichever of them you will."

"I will have none save the head cook," Naamah answered.

When the king learned from the queen of the princess' determination, he wished to slay both Solomon and Naamah; but when his anger cooled down, he bade one of his servants to take both Solomon and Naamah, lead them into the desert, and there leave them to perish. Solomon and Naamah were thus left in the wilderness without

food. They wandered on until they came to the borders of the sea. There Solomon found some fishermen for whom he agreed to work. In payment for his services, he received every day two fishes.

Thus time passed on, till one day, Solomon's wife, Naamah, while cleaning one of the fishes, found in its body a ring which she brought to her husband. Solomon at once recognized it as the ring which he had put in the hand of Asmodeus. The demon had not been able to wear the ring because on it was engraved the Name of God, and he had cast it into the sea where the fish had swallowed it. Solomon was filled with great joy, and with great haste he returned with Naamah to Jerusalem.

When Solomon told the people of Jerusalem that he was their king, they considered him a lunatic. It came to the ears of the members of the Sanhedrin that there was a lunatic roaming about the streets of Jerusalem who claimed to be the real king of Israel. The elders sent for Benaiah, the chief of the king's men, and said to him: "There is a man who claims to be Solomon. He does not seem to be insane, for we have examined him and he seems to be a very wise and learned man. Can you explain this to us?"

"I have not been invited to see the king for many years," replied Benaiah, "so I am unable to solve this problem."

"Neither have we been called to the king's court for a long time," stated the learned men of the Sanhedrin. "Go and investigate the matter at the king's court. Speak to the king's mother Bath-sheba; she may throw some light on the mystery."

Benaiah was informed by Bath-sheba and other members of the king's court that the behavior of the king had completely changed. He had become rude and ungentlemanly and he acted in no respect as he had been wont to. Benaiah, disregarding the threats of the royal gatekeepers, forced his entrance into the king's palace, and when he looked at the legs of the supposed king, he knew that it was Asmodeus, for the demon had the legs of a cock. Benaiah at once pronounced the Name of God, and Asmodeus uttered a loud piercing cry and vanished through the ceiling of the room.

Thereupon Benaiah went back to the Sanhedrin, called for the beggar in ragged clothes and torn sandals, and, pointing to him, exclaimed: "Long live King Solomon!" Solomon then told the assembly of all that had befallen him, and the wandering beggar and his wife were brought to the royal palace with great pomp and circumstance.

Later on Solomon summoned the king of Ammon and said to him: "Some time ago you had in your employ a chief cook who married princess Naamah. You did not consent to their marriage

and you killed them both. Now you will have to account for their death."

"I did not exactly kill them," replied the king of Ammon. "I merely banished them for the disobedience of my daughter."

At a sign given by Solomon, Queen Naamah appeared wearing a golden crown on her head, and Solomon bade her sit on the throne next to himself. The king of Ammon recognized the daughter he had banished. He was greatly astonished and exclaimed: "How did my daughter ever escape the desert and find favor with the greatest of kings?"

Then said Solomon: "Behold! I was your head cook, and this is your daughter."

The king of Ammon was overjoyed at the happy union, and he returned to his own land with a glad heart.

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